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THE POETICAL WORKS OF

WILLIAM COWPER

WITH NOTES AND A MEMOIR

BY JOHN BRUCE

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(1731-18m)

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE present work is substantially a reprint of the "Aldine Edition of the Poetical Works of Cowper," edited by the late Rev. John Mitford. Without designing to put forth, in any sense, a critical edition of the works of this admirable Poet, the Editor has taken pains on two points; the one, to approach to a settlement of the text by a collation of all doubtful passages with the editions published in Cowper's life-time, and with the chief of those which have appeared more recently; the other point has been to add brief illustrative notes on passages which contain allusions to persons or circumstances, which have faded out of general knowledge.

A new Memoir of the Poet has also been prefixed. Mr. Mitford's memoir was pronounced by Southey to be "the most judicious," as the Aldine edition was declared to be "the best arranged," that had then appeared. But our knowledge of facts relating to Cowper is cumulative. It has

advanced considerably beyond the point which it had attained when Mr. Mitford wrote. It has been thought better, therefore, leaving Mr. Mitford's memoir to stand as a distinction of the previous Aldine editions, to prefix on the present occasion a memoir entirely re-written. It was the Editor's intention to have inserted in this memoir various letters and papers connected with the Poet with which he has been favoured, and which have never yet seen the light, but, although the present memoir contains many things which are new, the length to which all the Editor's unpublished materials would have extended, was found to be inconsistent with the size and general character of the present edition. They have therefore been reserved for a separate publication.

The Editor desires gratefully to acknowledge the contribution of valuable information which he has received from many friends. Miss Stokes, of Tyndale House, Cheltenham; Robert Cole, Esq., F.S.A.; W. Bodham Donne, Esq.; Edward Dalton, Esq., LL.D., of Dunkirk House, near Nailsworth; Henry Gough, Esq.; Thomas William King, Esq., York Herald; S. W. Rix, Esq., of Beccles; William J. Thoms, Esq., F.S.A., and James Yeowell, Esq., with many others, have favoured the Editor with most valuable communications.

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MEMOIR OF WILLIAM COWPER.

IN moments of fantastic playfulness, COWPER THE POET claimed for himself a Scottish descent. He spoke of a family of his name seated in Fifeshire, probably at Cupar, and speculated on one of his ancestors having crossed the border, *more Scotico*, in very humble plight. Whether this were merely a flight of imagination, whether he built on some traditional misinformation, or whether, as has been supposed, he desired in this manner to claim kindred with a worthy namesake—a bishop of Galloway—whose writings breathe the purest spirit of evangelical piety, cannot now be determined. If the supposition were not altogether baseless, the migration must have taken place at a very early period, for the poet's paternal pedigree is altogether unquestionable from the time of Edward IV. In the sixth year of that sovereign's reign a JOHN COWPER was settled at Strode, a hamlet in the parish of Slinfold, near Horsham, situate in a country which was described,

in 1690, by his descendant, who afterwards became Lord Chancellor, as "a sink of about fourteen miles broad, which receives all the water that falls from two long ranges of hills, on both sides of it, and not being furnished with convenient draining, is kept moist and soft by the water, until the middle of a dry summer." John Cowper married an heiress of consideration, a lady whose maiden name was Stanbridge, although at the time of her marriage with John Cowper she was the widow of Stephen Brode. By this fortunate union, the importance of which was borne in mind among the Cowpers even down to the times of the poet,[1] John Cowper laid the foundation of the higher fortunes of his family, although upon his death the attractive widow, by a third marriage, carried her person, and probably a part of her property, into the well-known family of the Auchers, of Westwell in Kent.

The Cowper descendants of Joan Stanbridge severed, in the second or third generation, into two branches. The elder son remained at Strode on his paternal acres; a younger son, the first WILLIAM of the family, pushed his fortunes in the metropolis. His descendants soon became leading citizens. The particular branch of industry to which they devoted themselves does not appear, but the memory of their locality is preserved in the name of Cowper's Court, Cornhill. From monuments to Cowpers, both in St.

[1] The poet used a book plate which bore the arms of Cowper and Stanbridge quarterly.

Michael's Church (rebuilt by Wren after the fire, and lately restored by Scott), and also in its less attractive neighbour, St. Peter's, it seems probable that the Cowpers resided in the former parish, but were connected with the latter by the acquisition of property, through the intermarriage of a second WILLIAM COWPER with Margaret Spencer, daughter of a leading inhabitant of St. Peter's, at the end of the reign of Henry VIII.

With the increase of wealth the citizen branch of the Cowpers renewed its connection with the south of England, but not with Strode, nor with Sussex. Without abandoning London, they purchased Ratling Court, in the parish of Nonington, which lies between Canterbury and Sandwich, a modest manorial residence, which became thenceforward the chief seat of that branch of the family.

JOHN COWPER, a son of the second William and of Margaret Spencer, served Sheriff of London in 1551, and was subsequently Alderman of Bridge Ward. On his death in 1609, he was interred in St. Peter's, Cornhill, under a monument, which shared the common fate in the fire of London.

WILLIAM COWPER, a son of the Alderman, is traced during the reigns of James I. and Charles I. as a collector of imposts or impositions, that is, of certain extra customs' duties not granted by parliament but imposed, and hence the name, by royal authority alone. An imposition of £3 per tun, levied on wines brought into the port of London, was entrusted to his management. He

had an office assigned to him in the Custom-house, with a salary for the performance of his duties, and partook in various other ways in the advantages which resulted from a connection with the treasury and the court. A purchase from the Earl of Salisbury of the remainder of a crown-lease, added Hertford Castle to Ratling Court, and carried with it a seat in parliament. Several leases were obtained by him of manors and lands of the see of Canterbury, and one from the see of Coventry and Lichfield. Finally, a baronetage, first of Nova Scotia, and afterwards of England, testified the favour of his sovereign. These honours and emoluments were the more easily procured by Sir William, from his being a known and conspicuous friend of the Church, a character particularly evidenced in 1634, by his erecting a monument in the church of Bourne, near Nonington, to the memory of his spiritual father the judicious Hooker. Sir William was also the first poet of the family. Izaak Walton has printed some lines written by him on his erection of the monument to Hooker.

On the occurrence of the civil troubles, Sir William Cowper could not fail to be a sufferer. Obnoxious to the political reformers as the collector of an impost which they deemed to be illegal, and bound to King and Church by many important ties, he not only refused to contribute to the fund for raising the Parliamentary forces, but sent two of his younger sons into the royal army. The Parliament adopted towards him the same course as towards other royalists. He was

deprived of his office in the Custom-house; his lands in Kent and Hertfordshire were sequestered until he paid a composition; the properties comprised in his church leases were sold, with other episcopal lands, to the highest bidder; and finally, he himself, and John Cowper his eldest son, on their refusal to contribute to the expenses of the Parliamentary army, were committed to custody in Ely House. The young man sank under the hardships of incarceration; the father was released after thirteen months' imprisonment, and survived to witness the Restoration, to narrate the story of his sufferings and losses, which latter he estimated at £17,000, in the ear of the restored Sovereign, and to sue for fresh leases of his church-lands. He died in 1664.

Sir William's eldest son, who died in the incarceration of Ely House, had two grandsons, WILLIAM and SPENCER, who were both educated for the bar. William became Lord Chancellor and the first Earl Cowper; Spencer, after having himself been tried for murder and very properly acquitted, although on the evidence, as it has descended to us, his conduct on the occasion in question was mysterious and unfeeling, became himself a Welsh Judge, and a Judge of the Court of Common Pleas, and presided at the trials of others. He had three sons: WILLIAM and ASHLEY, successively clerks in the House of Lords, and JOHN, who took holy orders, was a royal chaplain, rector of Great Berkhamstead, and, of all things for a clergyman to be, registrar of commissions of bankruptcy.

This reverend gentleman, a son of a Judge of

the Common Pleas, a nephew of Lord Chancellor Cowper, a great-great-grandson of Sir William Cowper the royalist, and seventh in descent from the William Cowper who removed from Strode to Cornhill, was the father of WILLIAM COWPER THE POET. It is clear that in this pedigree there is neither room nor possibility for the conjectured migration from Cupar-Fife.

The descent of the poet's mother, Anne, daughter of Roger Donne, of Ludham in Norfolk, Esq., is asserted to have been far more ancient and dignified than that of his father. It was with reference to her traditional ancestry that the poet remarked,

> "My boast is not that I deduce my birth
> From loins enthroned and rulers of the earth,"

and, as if to remove any possible doubt from the meaning of this allusion, conjointly with some of his mother's relatives, he certified his traditional maternal pedigree to the College of Arms, where it was duly registered.

We are assured by Dr. John Johnson, who was the principal instigator of Cowper in this little flash of family pride, that the descent of Mrs. Cowper was "through the families of Hippisley, of Throughley in Sussex, and Pellet, of Bolney in the same county, from the several noble houses of West, Knollys, Carey, Boleyn, Howard, and Mowbray, and so by four different lines from Henry III. King of England."

If the pedigree, which is without proof, may be depended upon, all this might be shown by other evidence, but the red blood of Henry III., after

having been filtered through the families enumerated by Dr. Johnson, and through Mr. Bruin Clench, of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields (Mrs. Cowper's maternal grandfather) who should have been added to the persons mentioned by Dr. Johnson, must have well-nigh lost its colour ere it flowed through the veins of the poet. The points of greatest popular interest to be gathered from the pedigree, if it may be depended upon, are that Mrs. Cowper descended (through a succession of six females) from Mary Boleyn, the sister of Queen Anne Boleyn, and also from the same family as the poet Donne, the Dean of St. Paul's. But enough of this. It is clear that, on both sides, the poet's parentage was that of a gentleman, and neither in his writings nor in his manners, is it difficult to discover indications of his gentle blood.[1]

At the birth of the poet, which took place on the 15th of November, 1731, his father was incumbent of Berkhamstead, and it was in what Cowper terms the pastoral house of that parish, not in the handsome residence which now claims that designation, but in a building of far more homely and picturesque appearance which then stood upon the same site, that he first saw the light. His parents had five other children, but all died in early infancy save himself and a brother

[1] The pedigree as certified by Cowper, and many other evidences of facts, here stated for the first time, were intended to have been published in this memoir, but their length has rendered it impossible. The editor proposes to include them in a larger biography, which will ere long be published separately.

John, six years his junior, whose birth in November, 1737, proved fatal to their mother.

Never had the death of a mother a more immediate and disastrous influence upon the happiness of a child than in the instance of William Cowper. Infirmity of physical constitution, probably inherited in part from the parent he so early lost, exhibited itself from his infancy, and especially in an intensity of feeling which engraved even the trivialities of his little existence ineradicably upon his memory. He was but six years old when his mother died. At such an age how feeble, generally speaking, is the impression produced by the ordinary occurrences of daily life. How soon is it altogether worn away. With Cowper it was not so. The lapse of fifty years, and the storms of a disturbed and anxious life, did not efface from his memory even circumstances the most minute. It is not that the heavy sound of the bell that "tolled upon" his mother's "burial-day," and the dismal feelings connected with "the hearse that bore her slow away," dwelt imperishably in his recollection. Every child might remember such unusual and startling incidents, even from an earlier age. The peculiarity is that, in Cowper's instance, these things were mixed up with a thousand other events, which an ordinary child would probably never have observed, and certainly would never have borne in mind. Of this character are

> "The nightly visits to his chamber made,
> That she might know him safe, and warmly laid;"

her morning bounties ere he left his home to pass

a few hours in some dame-school in the town; "the biscuit or confectionary plum;" the fragrant waters on his cheeks bestowed by her own hand,

——"till fresh they shone and glowed,"

and, above all, the "sweet smile" which he commemorates over and over again as the outward token of that

"Constant flow of love that knew no fall,
Ne'er roughened by those cataracts and breaks
That humour interposed too often makes."

In his mother's day ladies adorned themselves with dresses on the tissue of which were elaborately represented the brightest and sweetest of our flowers—"the violet, the pink, and jessamine." One of Cowper's amusements as a child was to stand at his mother's knee, and with a pin to prick off upon a paper some presumed delineation of these mimic beauties. Half a century afterwards the incidents of this little comedy are brought back to life. In a few simple lines we are made to see the playful infant and the delighted mother:—

"And thou wast happier than myself the while,
Wouldst softly speak, and stroke my head and smile."

From the loving care of such an indulgent mother, doting with anxious affection upon her sensitive boy, the sole survivor of a family of six children, the nervous child was, upon his mother's death, suddenly transferred to what he terms "a considerable" boys'-school, kept by Dr. Pitman at

Market-street. Unless founded upon some imperative necessity, such a measure was ill-judged if not cruel. To the boy it was peculiarly unfortunate. "I had hardships," he says, "of various kinds to conflict with, which I felt more sensibly in proportion to the tenderness with which I had been treated at home. But my chief affliction consisted in being singled out from all the other boys, by a lad of about fifteen years of age, as a proper object upon whom he might let loose the cruelty of his temper. I choose to conceal a particular recital of the many acts of barbarity with which he made it his business continually to persecute me: it will be sufficient to say that he had, by his savage treatment of me, impressed such a dread of his figure upon my mind, that I well remember being afraid to lift up my eyes upon him higher than his knees; and that I knew him by his shoe-buckles better than any other part of his dress." This shameful treatment, persevered in for two years, did infinite mischief to the poor boy who was its subject. Brooding over wrongs which he suffered in secret, the gaiety natural to his years was lost, a tendency to occasional fits of melancholy, to which he tells us all his father's family were disposed, was dangerously encouraged, and even his health was seriously impaired. Bodily infirmity made itself apparent in a weakness of his eyes. The boy was shy, silent, and uncomplaining, and before sufficient attention was given to the state of his health, he was threatened with permanent injury to his sight. When inquiry was instituted, he was taken from Dr. Pitman's, and

sent to reside with Disney the oculist, for the benefit of the constant attention of himself and his wife. At the same time the cruelty to which he had been subjected was brought to light, and his persecutor was expelled from Dr. Pitman's school.

At the expiration of a year, Cowper having received some benefit from the treatment of his oculist, was "dispatched," as he says, "to Westminster," then under the mastership of Dr. Nichol, a kind old man, whose good qualities were long remembered by his distinguished pupil.

During his "seven years' apprenticeship to the classics," Cowper entered into all the active amusements of a public school. He excelled at cricket and at foot-ball, and in one of his poems has commemorated his delight even in some of the minor amusements of the school-boy :—

> "As happy as we once to kneel and draw
> The chalky ring, and knuckle down at taw;
> To pitch the ball into the grounded hat,
> Or drive it devious with a dextrous pat."

Westminster was, on the whole, a pleasant place to him. He was on good terms both with masters and fellow-pupils. Of Dr. Nichol we have already spoken; simple, slovenly Vinny Bourne, an excellent Latin scholar and poet, the usher of Cowper's form, was popular not only with Cowper but throughout the school; Dr. Pierson Lloyd, another usher, was highly regarded by him; and among his school-fellows, there were several to whom he was drawn by the strong attraction of an early

love of literature. Robert Lloyd, son of Dr. Pierson Lloyd, and George Colman the elder, were scholars of his own standing, and Cumberland, with the subsequent opponents on a wider field, Warren Hastings and Elijah Impey, and the future Lord Dartmouth, were all, in some part of his course, his contemporaries. But his special friend in the school was young William Russell, afterwards the seventh baronet of the lineage of the Russells of Chippenham, in Cambridgeshire, a family connected with the Protector Cromwell by a variety of relationships. Sir William was himself the Protector's great-great-grandson. Nor is there any reason to suppose that Cowper's merit and scholarship were not adequately acknowledged by the heads of the school. In one of his letters he makes mention of the gratification which "little poets" derived from the rewards bestowed upon their successful exercises, in terms which clearly indicate personal experience. The "silver groat" had doubtless been received by him, and he had partaken in the pleasure of seeing his composition sent round "from form to form for the admiration of all who were able to understand it."

But even whilst at Westminster, in the midst of many sources of boyish pleasure, and apparently without having any real cause of unhappiness, his occasional fits of melancholy were accompanied by symptoms of a serious character. Obvious delusions began to mingle with his waking thoughts, and to be accepted and to be acted upon as if they were realities. At one time, the even beating of a steady pulse engendered the idea, which he

"entertained with no small complacency," that perhaps he might never die; at another time, the young pulse-watcher was overwhelmed with a conviction that in his lowness of spirits he found evidence of what he terms "a consumptive habit," which he thought to be a peculiar disgrace, and the symptoms of which he could therefore never prevail upon himself to disclose to any one. In these slight indications we trace the progress of the disease which ultimately overthrew his reason.

The infirmity in his eyes troubled him until about his fourteenth year, when an attack of small-pox marred his countenance but proved an excellent oculist. Throughout his life, whenever his health was out of order, the weakness of his eyes returned, but the use of a preparation which he calls "Elliott's medicines," and which he stumbled upon during an excursion to Maidenhead, always brought relief.

In April, 1748, when in his eighteenth year, and before he left school, his profession was determined for him. On the 29th of that month he was entered of the Middle Temple, with the view of being called to the bar. A few months later in that same year he was removed from Westminster, and after nine months passed at home in Berkhamstead, was articled to Mr. Chapman, a solicitor, for three years. This was thought to be a way of securing him an insight into legal practice whilst keeping his terms.

The results were little likely to be of any professional advantage. In Southampton-row, Russell-square, at a short distance from Mr. Chapman's office,

resided Cowper's uncle, his father's brother, Ashley Cowper, afterwards Clerk of the Parliaments, with his wife and three daughters, two of them just on the threshold of womanhood. It was arranged that Cowper should spend his Sundays and leisure hours with these near relations. Nothing could be more agreeable to him. Cheerful companionship was at all times his delight, and it soon came to pass that he slept indeed at Mr. Chapman's, but day by day, and at all hours, he left the office in the care of others, and might be found, from morning to night, "giggling and making giggle" with Harriet and Theodora Jane, the two eldest of his cousins. In this delightful occupation he was energetically assisted by his only friend among his fellow-clerks, Edward Thurlow, a rough, clever, persevering fellow, nearly of the same age as Cowper, who, rising from the same rank in society as his friend, but without possessing his connections, and totally devoid of his interest in high quarters, by mere dint of talent made his way to the woolsack. Cowper, duly estimating the vigour of his companion's intellect, and contrasting it with his own want of energy, is said on a particular occasion to have exclaimed, "Thurlow, I am nobody, and shall be always nobody, and you will be chancellor. You shall provide for me when you are!" Thurlow smiled and answered, "I surely will!" The conversation took place at the house of a friend, in the presence of some of the ladies of the family. "These ladies," said Cowper, "are witnesses!" "Let them be so," answered the future Chancellor, "for I will certainly do it."

In this sprightly thoughtless way Cowper's clerkship passed quickly and merrily. During these three years of charming idleness, his manners were much improved by female companionship, and we hear of no fits of melancholy; at the end of them, he had attained his majority, he was within two years of the time when he might be called to the bar, but he had made no progress in the study of his profession, and was over head and ears in love with the second of his delightful cousins, Theodora Jane.

Immediately after his clerkship had expired, with boyish thirst for independence, he took chambers in the Middle Temple, preparatory to his call to the bar. The brief intermediate period belongs altogether to the history of his affections. Of study of any kind, except some little reading in the classics, we have no trace, but he made ample progress in his courtship. His attachment was ardently returned, the heart of his cousin was entirely won, and little incidents in the history of their courtship furnished themes for the earliest efforts of his muse. His seclusion in the Temple soon began to produce the results which might have been anticipated. Of all persons in the world he was perhaps the least fitted to do battle with the loneliness of living in chambers. Such a position for a nervous, sensitive, fidgety person, without an occupation, or any serious study, and with feelings constantly directed towards an absent object, was a mere invitation for the return of his melancholy. "I was struck," he says, "with such a dejection of spirits, as none but

they who have felt the same can have the least conception of. Day and night I was upon the rack, lying down in horror, and rising up in despair." Agitated and almost overwhelmed, he sought relief in medicine, in the advice of friends, in religion. He looked for the latter in the poems of George Herbert, quaint and beautiful, but wanting in the only quality which would make them a source of comfort to a troubled spirit. Still Herbert led him to prayer. He composed "a set of prayers," and made frequent use of them. They soothed and temporarily palliated, but could not cure. A change of air and scene, exercise, and the company of friends, were more effectual. He accompanied Mr. Thomas Hesketh, afterwards created a baronet, and who subsequently married Theodora's elder sister Harriet, to Southampton. Ere Cowper had been long there the sweet influences which surrounded him did their work. After a walk to Freemantle, he seated himself on a bank overlooking Southampton Water. The beauties of the scene delighted him. Earth, sea, and air, seemed to call upon him to rejoice. His mind obeyed. The functional derangement which had suspended its healthy action passed away. The black cloud which had hung over him was removed. He became light and joyful in a moment, and poured out his heart in thanksgiving. "I could have wept with transport," he exclaims, "had I been alone."

He passed several months in amusement at Southampton, but in his amusements, as in every thing else, Cowper had none of the tastes of the

hardy or the robust. It was with difficulty that he was ever brought to mount a horse, and an excursion by water was a wearisomeness and not a delight. Mr. Hesketh was a practised sailor. His yacht, the good sloop *Harriet*, was lying in Southampton Water. Cowper says, "I gave myself an air, and wore trousers," but he admits that it was sorely against his will that he was occasionally "pressed into the service" for a cruise in the Solent, a visit to Portsmouth, or an excursion round the Isle of Wight. "A walk to Netley Abbey, or to Freemantle, or to Redbridge, or a book by the fire-side, had always more charms for me than any other amusement." Almost, as it would seem, in spite of himself, he returned to London with health quite restored, and in June, 1754, was called to the bar.

There is no trace of his ever having held a brief; little idea that he would do so could have been entertained by his friends, and none by himself. His hopes were fixed from the first upon obtaining an appointment to one of several patent offices in connection with the House of Lords, the nomination to which was vested in one of his paternal relations. To qualify himself for such an appointment, and not with any view to legal practice, he had procured himself to be called to the bar, and having done so, he had now merely to pass, as best he could, through the intermediate period until the desired vacancy occurred. Unimpeded by professional ties he was thus left free to prosecute his courtship, but that soon received a check. His experience attested the truth of the

poetical law, that "the course of true love never does run smooth." What prudent father, perceiving Cowper's inaptitude for business, coupled with a constant restlessness, which he describes as having made it, at that time of his life, essential to his comfort to be in perpetual motion, but would have hesitated to give encouragement to such a union? The young lady herself was nothing loth. In the fulness of her affection, she was willing to run all risks, but her decision was expressed in terms too flighty to afford any comfort to an anxious parent. "If you marry William Cowper," inquired her father, whilst the question was in agitation, "what will you do?" "Do, sir?" answered the thoughtless *inamorata*, "wash all day, and ride out on the great dog at night!" Mr. Ashley Cowper hesitated long, but ultimately determined in the negative, on the ground of their near relationship; he set his face against the marriage of cousins. This was probably not the only reason, if indeed it were not merely an excuse. The occasional state of Cowper's mind may well have alarmed his uncle (himself too frequently a prey to the hereditary melancholy of the family), whilst the waywardness of Theodora, a waywardness which ultimately brought her into a condition of crazy oddity very nearly allied to madness, could have given her father's anxiety no relief.

Ashley Cowper had refused his consent to the contemplated marriage, but all communication between Cowper and Theodora had not been broken off, when on the 10th of July, 1756, Cow-

per was summoned to Berkhamstead, on account of the sudden illness of his father. Seized with apoplexy, he died just before Cowper arrived. Cowper seldom mentions his father. When he does so it is not otherwise than with respect, yet never in terms which indicate much affection. The course of his life, from the death of his mother, had greatly severed them; but Berkhamstead was Cowper's youthful home, and he was often enough there to "feel a relation" to every tree, and gate, and stile, in all that country, and to prefer the parsonage-house to a palace. Dr. Cowper had married again, and Cowper had but little communication with his mother-in-law. In all his correspondence he mentions her but once. She probably continued, after her husband's death, to reside at Berkhamstead, and employed Cowper with a frequency which he thought somewhat troublesome, in purchasing flower-seeds for her garden.

Dr. Cowper died intestate. On 3rd August, 1756, Cowper, on the renunciation of the widow, took out letters of administration. We have no account of the estate, but it was evidently of comparatively small amount. The doctor's expenditure on his two sons had been considerable. That on his son William may be conjectured from our preceding narrative. John, who was at this time nineteen years of age, was a student of Corpus Christi College, and was designed for his father's profession.

Returning to the Temple, with an increasing sense of solitariness in being disunited from his

native place, Cowper's life for the next year or two was principally marked by fresh incidents of trouble. His uncle Ashley removed from Southampton-row to Palace-yard, and took the opportunity of this change of residence to close his doors against his nephew. Uncle and nephew did not quarrel, but the former insisted that Theodora should break off all communication with her lover. She obeyed, with a firmness and honesty of submission which speak volumes in her favour, for it is clear that her conduct was very far from being the result either of heartlessness or of inconstancy. Amidst many changes she remained without any other attachment. She watched Cowper's movements with undiminished interest, and occasionally assisted him with anonymous gifts; regarding, at the same time, his new female friends with something of natural jealousy, and retaining the poems which he had addressed to her, and those of which he had given her copies, as sacred relics. Near the close of her life, for reasons which have not been disclosed, she deposited these cherished memorials in a sealed packet with a lady, her particular friend, with directions that the contents should not be inspected until after her death. Theodora and her friend died within a short time of each other. On the death of Theodora, who was the survivor, the executors of her friend sent the packet to Mr. James Croft, whose relation Sir Archer Croft had married Theodora's younger sister. He published from it a little volume of Cowper's Early Poems.[1]

[1] Poems, the Early Productions of William Cowper, now

Nor were the successive losses of father and mistress the only deprivations under which Cowper was at this time called upon to suffer. He had retained his school-boy affection for his earliest friend, William Russell, who had now succeeded to his family baronetage. The precise extent to which their acquaintance was carried after they left Westminster, does not appear. Young Russell held a commission in the Guards, and probably their opportunities of meeting were not very numerous, but Cowper's sensibility was touched to the quick by his sudden death, which occurred whilst bathing in the Thames.

These incidents occasioned some return of Cowper's melancholy. His cousin Harriet, whom he still occasionally saw, rallied him upon the subject, attributing his gloom to ill-humour. He answered in lines, which were probably the earliest of his compositions, in which deep feeling was expressed with true pathetic force. The manuscript of this genuine outburst from a sorrow-stricken heart, has been long lost, but the lines had so fixed themselves in the memory of Lady Hesketh, that she was able to recal them, perhaps with Theodora's assistance, after the lapse of many years. That their writer was deeply alive to the miseries of his forlorn condition cannot be doubted:—

> "Doomed as I am, in solitude to waste
> The present moments, and regret the past,

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first published from the originals in the possession of James Croft, with anecdotes of the Poet, collected from letters of Lady Hesketh, written during her residence at Olney. London, 12mo. 1825.

Deprived of every joy I valued most,
My friend torn from me, and my mistress lost,
Call not this gloom I wear, this anxious mien,
The dull effect of humour or of spleen!
Still, still I mourn, with each returning day,
Him snatched by fate in early youth away,
And her—through tedious years of doubt and pain,
Fixed in her choice and faithful—but in vain.

See me, ere yet my distant course half done,
Cast forth a wanderer on a wild unknown!
See me neglected on the world's rude coast,
Each dear companion of my voyage lost!
Nor ask why clouds of sorrow shade my brow,
And ready tears wait only leave to flow,
Why all that soothes a heart from anguish free,
All that delights the happy, palls with me!"

With Cowper, indulgence in such feelings was fraught with imminent danger, but at this time, expectation of the approach of an appointment, or some unwonted burst of energy, brought him relief, by forcing his thoughts into the channel of his profession. To this period belongs the only known evidence of his ever having given himself to any legal studies—a Common-place Book in his handwriting, devoted to legal subjects, the greater part of the volume consisting of a treatise entitled "An Institute of the Law relative to Trials at Nisi Prius, in seven parts." This attention to his profession was followed by his appointment as a Commissioner of Bankrupts, an office which brought him in about £60 per annum, an acceptable but insufficient addition to his fast diminishing means. It is a subject of surprise that his bashful nature permitted him to perform even the duties of this Commissionership. But those duties

were for the most part of a merely formal character, and were executed by the Commissioners not singly, but as a body, and in all matters of difficulty under the direction of a chief Commissioner, who always took the lead. It has been doubted whether he ever really acted as a Commissioner, but positive evidence is in existence of his having done so. At this period he also purchased a set of chambers, in an airy situation in the Inner Temple, to which he removed from those he had formerly occupied, a measure of economy as well as of health.

It was now, also, that he renewed his acquaintance with a body of his Westminster friends, by joining the Nonsense Club, an association in which seven Westminster men dined together every Thursday. Cowper was probably induced to join this society by Joseph Hill, one of these Westminster men, who was in practice as an attorney in Great Queen-street, and was afterwards secretary to Lord Thurlow, and a resident in Savile-row. Of Hill's early connections or history little is known. His acquaintance with Thurlow was brought about by Cowper. With Cowper, Westminster School, so far as is at present known, was his only early connecting link. His person is pictured and immortalised in Cowper's couplet:—

> "An honest man, close-buttoned to the chin,
> Broad cloth without, and a warm heart within."

On the death of Cowper's father, Cowper required assistance in the affairs which it fell upon him, as administrator, to transact. The business was

entrusted to Hill. His judicious management strengthened whatever former ties may have existed between him and his client. They became firm friends and constant companions. Cowper's business affairs were thenceforward put entirely into Hill's hands, and so continued throughout the remainder of Cowper's life, whilst for several years, in all periods of relaxation, the two friends took excursions into various parts of England, and on those occasions occupied lodgings together.

The connecting link between the members of the Nonsense Club was a love of literature. Bonnell Thornton, the elder George Colman, and Robert Lloyd, the leading members, were all practised men of letters. The two former were engaged, at the time when Cowper joined them, in the publication of the *Connoisseur*; and Lloyd had made himself well known by "The Actor," a successful poem of dramatic criticism. It has been supposed that the "Exhibition of Sign Boards," in ridicule of the Exhibitions of Paintings at the Society of Arts, and also the mock ode for St. Cecilia's Day, accompanied by the salt box, the Jew's harp, marrow-bones and cleavers, and hurdy-gurdy, proceeded from this Club. Thornton was the author of these amusing efforts of ridicule, and they must have afforded subjects for conversation, suggestion, and comment in the Club, but there is no evidence that the Club or any other member shared the authorship or responsibility. Their meetings, like those of many similar associations, traceable from the reign of James I, (an actual Nonsense Club existed in the reign of his suc-

cessor,) were those of gaiety and good-humour; their conversation was full of joke and raillery, repartee and witty nonsense; but there is no trace of their having acted jointly in anything, save in the customary transactions of their meetings. Cowper joined in all their fun, we doubt not, with heartiness. No one delighted in cheerful society more than he, nor probably had any of the members so much cause to do so, for to him such association brought temporary relief from the dreadful melancholy which from time to time overwhelmed him. Nor was his connection with this society otherwise than practically useful to him. It led him to literature, and taught him to seek relief in his hours of deepest depression, in literary composition. From this time he began to exercise his pen freely. He wrote essays which were inserted in the *Connoisseur;* he produced ballads, two or three of which became popular; he addressed letters to the *St. James's Chronicle;* he assisted the Duncombes in the translation of Horace; he joined his brother in a version of a portion of the "Henriade;" and he steadily applied himself, as a labour of love, to a regular study of the text of the "Iliad" and "Odyssey," with a young friend named Alston, comparing the original as they proceeded with Pope's translation. Whilst thus exerting himself in the only kind of occupation which seemed open to him, the state of his mind was becoming more and more terrible, and his anticipations of the final result more definite. In an epistle to Robert Lloyd, which was written about this period, he thus de-

scribes the feelings which drove him to versification. It was not, he said, to interfere with Lloyd's poetic gifts, nor to show his own genius or wit, that he presumed to address the Muse:—

> "But to divert a fierce banditti,
> Sworn foes to every thing that's witty,
> That with a black infernal train
> Make cruel inroads in my brain,
> And daily threaten to drive thence
> My little garrison of sense:
> The fierce banditti which I mean,
> Are gloomy thoughts led on by Spleen."

All this while, too, his patrimonial fund was gradually wasting, until the diminution startled him —never sensitive upon pecuniary subjects—with anticipations of approaching want. But in the spring of 1763, there came a great change.

The Clerk of the Journals of the House of Lords died, and Mr. De Grey, who held the offices of Reading Clerk and Clerk of Committees, both which he executed by deputy, resigned. The patronage of all these offices was vested in Major Cowper, a cousin of Cowper's. He was at that time living at a coffee-house near the Temple, in the neighbourhood of Cowper's chambers. Calling upon Cowper one day, as was his constant custom, he invited him "to take a turn" in the Temple garden, and there explained to him what had happened in reference to the offices in the House of Lords, and made him an offer of the two most profitable places, those, namely, which had been held by Mr. De Grey. Thus, what Cowper had apparently been living for, was at once realized.

He accepted the offer instantly. The goal to which his wishes and way of life had tended was reached. But in that very moment his heart smote him. How was he to execute a business of so public a nature? He returned to his chambers thoughtful and unhappy, and Major Cowper was astonished to find, in the place of cheerful gratitude and delight, an air of deep melancholy in all he said or did. Of the places then vacated, the Clerkship of the Journals was the least valuable, but its duties were to be executed in private. Major Cowper intended to appoint his friend Mr. Arnold to that office. After a week of violent mental agitation and perplexity between "the apparent folly of casting away the only chance he had of being well provided for, and the impossibility of retaining it," Cowper wrote to his friend the Major, "though he lodged in a manner at the next door," and they generally spent the day together, begging him to transfer the greater benefit to Arnold. Major Cowper consented, and something like a calm was restored to Cowper's mind. But now a fresh trouble arose. Major Cowper's right of nomination was contested. The matter became a subject of inquiry and dispute, and the intended Clerk of the Journals was informed that he must prepare for an examination at the bar of the House touching his competency for the post he was about to undertake. "A thunderbolt," he remarks, "would have been as welcome to me as this intelligence." All the horror of his previous fears and perplexities returned. "They whose spirits are formed like mine, to whom a public exhibition of them-

selves on any occasion is mortal poison, may have some idea of the horror of my situation; others can have none." It became expedient that he should visit the office of the House of Lords daily, in order to come to an understanding of his intended duties, by inspection and study of the journals of the House. He did so, but it was in a state of such mental excitement, that the opportunity was altogether thrown away. "Quiet forsook me by day," he says, "and peace by night; a finger raised against me was more than I could stand against. . . . I was not in a condition to receive instruction, much less to elicit it out of manuscripts without direction." Such was the state of things in the summer of 1763. In the autumn, he visited Margate. By the help of cheerful company, a new scene, and the intermission of his painful employment, the same result ensued as at Freemantle, he soon recovered his health and spirits.

But all his misery came surging back on his return to London, and the resumption of his ineffectual labour. Resign he deemed that he could not, without running the hazard of ruining his benefactor's right of appointment. He saw no course open but to expose himself to a public rejection for insufficiency; his little knowledge, he was quite convinced, would forsake him at the bar of the House. How was such a disgrace to be avoided? His mind, under the influence of his weakened nerves, had been long familiar with the idea of madness. He had looked forward to it as the probable termination of his attacks of

melancholy. He now wished for it with impatient expectation, as his only chance of escaping the dreaded appearance before the Lords. His fear was that his senses would not fail him in time. The day for his appearance drew near, and, as he conceived, his mind was still untouched. It now seemed to him that suicide was his only resource. He grew sullen and reserved, fled from society, even that of his most intimate friends; shut himself up in his chambers, and argued himself into a belief of the lawfulness of self-murder. Assuming a cheerful and unconcerned air, he entered an apothecary's shop, and boldly asked for a half-ounce phial of laudanum. It was sold to him. The day before the one fixed for his attendance in the House, being at breakfast in a coffee-house, he took up a newspaper. A letter in it upon some mere trivial subject gradually assumed, as he read it, the character of a satire upon himself, written with a knowledge of his purpose of self-destruction, and maliciously urging him to its execution. In that moment his reason was overthrown. He said within himself, "Your cruelty shall be gratified; you shall have your revenge;" and flinging down the paper rushed hastily out of the room. During the remainder of that day, and in the course of the night following, he made numerous attempts to commit suicide. His first idea was to betake himself to the fields between what was then the north side of London and Highgate, and there to find some house or ditch in which he might drink his laudanum unobserved. Before he had walked a mile in the fields, he abandoned that mode of

suicide, and determined to sell what he had in the funds, transport himself into France, live there until his means were exhausted, and then change his religion, and seek an asylum in a monastery. He returned home and began to pack up his portmanteau, when the absurdity of his design flashed upon him, and he instantly abandoned it. He then took coach to the Custom-house Quay, in order to drown himself. He found the tide low, and a porter seated on some goods, "as if on purpose to prevent" the execution of his intention. He tried to drink the laudanum in the hackney coach on his return to his chambers, but was hindered by fear and nervous agitation; and again, in his bed room, but was restrained by the same causes, and by a fancied monitory voice, which charged him "to consider and live."

After several hours of sleep he awoke with the consciousness that the fatal morning had arrived, and that his purpose must be executed. He arose ere it was day, and finding his penknife, returned to bed and strove several times to plunge it into his heart, but "the point was broken off square, and it would not penetrate." When the day broke, and he heard the clock strike seven, it occurred to him that no time should be lost; the chambers would soon be opened, and Major Cowper would call to take him to Westminster. He arose, and intended to bolt his chamber door, but in his agitation his touch deceived him, and he left it as he found it. He suspended himself by his garter to a corner of his bedstead, the framework gave way and he fell to the ground; he made a similar

attempt at another place, but again the frame broke short off and let him down. He tried a third time, fastening one end of the garter round the upper corner of the door. He remained suspended long enough to lose all consciousness. Just before the last ray of intellectual animation forsook him, he believed that he heard a voice say three times, "'Tis over!" a fact, the certainty of which he declared three or four years after. His fate would this time have been consummated, but the garter which had held him broke. On his recovery of sensation, he found himself fallen with his face to the floor. Reeling and staggering, he stumbled into bed. His laundress came in on hearing him fall. Cowper sent her to a friend, who fetched Major Cowper. Made aware of Cowper's attempts and their cause, the Major kindly remarked, "My dear Mr. Cowper, you terrify me; to be sure you cannot hold the office at this rate. Where is the deputation?" "I gave him," says Cowper, "the key of the drawer where it was deposited, and his business requiring his immediate attendance, he took it away with him; and thus ended all my connection with the Parliament House!"

It is not in the nature of mental maladies for the overturned mind to right itself immediately on the cessation of the shock which destroys its balance. If it abandons one delusion it ordinarily flies to another, and with marvellous and most perverse ingenuity, is never at a loss to open up for itself new sources of self-torture. Relinquishing the idea of suicide, Cowper now became apprehensive of apoplexy, and on the recommendation

of Major Cowper, consulted a physician. His mind was set at rest as to apoplexy, and he was advised to retire into the country. Without a companion, and not knowing whither to betake himself, the advice was deemed inapplicable, and he continued in his chambers, brooding in solitude over the tremendous transactions of the last few days.

A more miserable situation, or one more likely to be fatal to Cowper's future peace, can scarcely be conceived. Driven, in the distempered state of his judgment, to look within, what could he see but weakness, folly, and meditated crime? There had been at all times a tendency towards religiousness in his thoughts, probably at first instilled into him by his mother, and after her death encouraged by the position of his father as a clergyman, and by the practice of attending public worship (if it went no farther) in which he must have been brought up at Berkhamstead. His own narrative of his mental changes on religious subjects was written in a peculiar phase of mind, and underrates or overlooks this tendency, but its existence may be traced even in what he has himself recorded. To enter fully into this subject would lead us beyond our present limits. It is sufficient to point out the way in which, in past times of trouble, his thoughts had run upon promises or isolated passages of Scripture, and the manner in which they had affected him. Such passages would scarcely have occurred to a person whose mind had not been religiously trained, or if they had occurred, would not have been attended to.

An example is mentioned at the very commencement of the narrative to which we have alluded. Whilst at school at Market-street, and subject to the tyranny of his juvenile persecutor, he says: "One day as I was sitting alone on a bench in the school, melancholy, and almost ready to weep at the recollection of what I had already suffered, and expecting at the same time my tormentor every moment, these words of the Psalmist came into my mind, 'I will not be afraid of what man can do unto me.' I applied this," he continues, "to my own case, with a degree of trust and confidence in God, that would have been no disgrace to a much more experienced Christian. Instantly I perceived in myself a briskness of spirits, and a cheerfulness, which I had never before experienced, and took several paces up and down the room with joyful alacrity—His gift in whom I trusted."

On the present occasion his diseased mind, relieved from the fear of apoplexy, began to weigh his recent circumstances in their religious aspect. Walking to and fro in his chamber, he said within himself, "There never was so abandoned a wretch, so great a sinner!" and instantly jumped to the conclusion that he was shut out from mercy. He flew to the Bible for comfort, but he read it backward, like a witch's prayer. To him the Book of Mercy became a book of misery. He conceived that he had been guilty of the unpardonable sin, and at one moment thought himself hopelessly condemned by one passage, and at the next by another. The sword of the Spirit flamed against

him across every avenue by which he attempted to approach the fountain of goodness. The parable of the barren fig-tree was an inconceivable source of anguish to him. Such was the height of his madness, that he applied it to himself, "with a strong persuasion," as he says, "that when our Saviour pronounced a curse upon it, he had me in His eye, and pointed that curse directly at me."

Whatever he did furnished something out of which his mind distilled a poison. He called at the lodgings of Major Cowper. A volume of Beaumont and Fletcher was lying on the table. He opened it. The first sentence he saw ran thus, "The justice of the Gods is in it." He instantly applied the words to himself. "Everything preached to me," he remarks, "and everything preached the curse of the law." When he went into the street, he thought the people were talking about him, that they stood and laughed at him, and treated him with contempt. He bought a ballad of one who was singing it in the street, because he thought it was written on him, and as he walked along could hardly persuade himself that the voice of his conscience was not loud enough for every one to hear it. Waking or sleeping his condition was alike terrible. His thoughts were a continual torture, his dreams were full of horrors even still more fantastic. Everlasting punishment was the idea constantly before his mind, and as he dwelt upon it his delirium increased day by day. His brother, apprised of his condition, came up from Cambridge to visit him. His first words of salutation were,

"Oh, brother, I am damned! Think of eternity, and then think what it is to be damned!" All the comfort which his brother could administer rather exasperated than soothed. Among their numerous cousins they reckoned the Rev. Martin Madan, chaplain of the Lock Hospital, and a leading Evangelical clergyman. Cowper had been accustomed to laugh at him as an enthusiast. He now desired to hear his counsels. Madan promptly visited him. Sitting on the bedside together, the preacher of righteousness declared to him the Gospel of Salvation by a personal acceptance of the atonement made by Jesus Christ. The intellect of the poor madman grasped the ideas which were thus unfolded to him, as he declares, for the first time. As Madan proceeded, Cowper's heart warmed within him, he perceived something like a dawn of hope. For an instant his physical malady was controlled by the dignity of the theme and the power of the preacher, but it soon returned with ten-fold force, and with a new delusion. The doctrine set before him might be full of comfort for those who could take advantage of it; for him it came too late; he was at the point of death, about to be snatched suddenly away by Satan; about to be borne off to everlasting burnings. The horrible anticipation affected him with the vividness of an actual reality. He believed that deadly numbness had seized his extremities, before which his life was fast retreating, and that his soul "clung to his lips, as if on the very brink of departure."

His conduct in other respects now became so

perverse, and himself so unmanageable, that his brother consulted their relations as to what ought to be done with him. His cousin Harriet, Theodora's elder sister, went herself to his chambers, personally to ascertain his condition. He would neither speak to her, nor look at her. In one of his poems he has pictured the pitiable plight to which he was reduced :—

"Look where he comes—in this embowered alcove
Stand close concealed, and see a statue move;
Lips busy, and eyes fixed, foot falling slow,
Arms hanging idly down, hands clasped below,
Interpret to the marking eye distress
Such as its symptoms can alone express.
That tongue is silent now,—that silent tongue
Could argue once, could jest, or join the song,
Could give advice, could censure, or commend,
Or charm the sorrows of a drooping friend;
Renounced alike its office and its sport,
Its brisker and its graver strains fall short;
Both fail beneath a fever's secret sway,
And like a summer's brook are passed away."

His relations deemed it right that he should be placed under the care of Dr. Cotton, who kept a house for the reception of lunatic patients at St. Alban's. He was removed thither on the 7th of December, 1763, the business of letting his chambers, and the management of his other little affairs, being placed in the hands of his friend Hill. Thus terminated his residence in London.

Dr. Cotton, with whom Cowper had previously had a slight acquaintance, was a lively amiable man, of extreme kindness of disposition, and in many respects singularly well qualified for his

painful profession. In the instance of Cowper he was peculiarly so, not only as a pleasant companion, full of cheerful, amusing conversation, but as a religious man, capable of leading his patient's mind safely and gently in the new direction taken by his thoughts. Cowper describes him as one

> "Whose humanity sheds rays
> That make superior skill his second praise."

He was also a man of letters, author of poems and essays which were at one time popular.

For five months after his arrival at St. Alban's, Cowper's condition remained unaltered. Silent, and abandoned to despair, he lived in the momentary expectation that divine vengeance was about to plunge him into the bottomless pit. But quiet, medical treatment, and gentle control, began at length to produce their effect. He states the change which first ensued, as if it had been the result of an argument in his own mind, founded upon the evidence afforded by his continual existence, that the execution of the divine sentence against him was suspended. Others will rather consider it as a clear proof of an improvement in his health, both mental and bodily. He ceased to be silent. Although still carrying in his heart, as he conceived, a sentence of irrevocable doom, he entered into conversation with Dr. Cotton, laughed at his stories, and told him some of his own to match them. After this change had continued about three months, a communication from Dr. Cotton brought Cowper's brother to visit him. On both sides the meeting was at first a painful

one. In Cowper it revived recollections which almost threw him back into his former condition of reserve and silence. His brother was disappointed at finding, as he supposed, no greater improvement. Walking in the garden, Cowper expressed his old settled assurance of sudden judgment. His brother protested, as no doubt he had frequently done before, that it was all a delusion. Cowper's mind was now in a condition to give some attention to his brother's strong asseverations. "I burst into tears," he records, "and cried out, If it be a delusion, than am I the happiest of beings! Something like a ray of hope," he continues, "was shot into my heart." From that moment his recovery advanced rapidly. His brother and he dined together, and spent a cheerful afternoon, and when his brother had left him, something whispered to him every moment, "Still there is mercy."

His recovery, as it had been at Freemantle and at Margate, was, in its final stage, almost instantaneous. The people about him congratulated him immediately on the obvious change in his conduct and appearance. A good night's rest and pleasant dreams evidenced and confirmed his restoration, and when he repaired to breakfast on the following morning, the cloud of horror which had so long hung over him had passed away.

The return of his bodily and mental health was instantly followed by another change even still more momentous. A few days after his arrival at St. Alban's, he threw aside the Bible as a book in

which he had no longer any interest. Shortly after returning light had begun to dawn upon his mind, he one day found a Bible on a bench in the garden, probably laid there in his way. He opened it on the 11th of St. John, where Lazarus is raised from the dead. He was struck with the benevolence and sympathy exhibited by the Saviour, and sighed to think that he had rejected a Redeemer so good and merciful; but he closed the book and laid it aside, without intending to open it again. Immediately on his recovery he again appealed to it. "I flung myself," he says, "into a chair near the window, and seeing a Bible there, ventured once more to apply to it for comfort and instruction. The first verse I saw was the twenty-fifth of the 3rd of Romans: 'Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.' Immediately I received strength to believe, and the full beams of the Sun of Righteousness shone upon me. I saw the sufficiency of the atonement he had made, my pardon sealed in His blood, and all the fulness and completeness of His justification. In a moment I believed, and received the gospel. Whatever my friend Madan had said to me, so long before, revived in all its clearness, with demonstration of the Spirit and with power."

The delight of the young convert was unbounded. "Unless the Almighty arm had been under me," he says, "I think I should have died with gratitude and joy." His eyes were continually filled with tears, his voice was choked with transport.

To rejoice day and night was all his employment. The sudden transition alarmed his physician. With much anxiety he visited his patient every morning, and conversed with him without reserve on those themes which were now the subjects of his living faith. Nothing could be more beneficial to Cowper. In all circumstances, sympathy in those around him was absolutely necessary to his comfort. The heavenly ray which had beamed into his soul would, in his own estimation, have wanted half its cheerful beauty, had he been compelled to experience its effects alone.

Dr. Cotton was soon satisfied of the reality of Cowper's cure, but probably, partly under the doctor's advice, and partly on account of the circumstances in which Cowper was placed—compelled to begin the world again, and without any opening to a new way of life—he was in no hurry to quit St. Alban's. Where was he to find another home? Conscious of his infirmities, of his inability to lead a solitary life, or to make way in his profession, and probably feeling a distaste, engendered by the thoughts and principles which he had taken to be his future guides, towards some late associations, he determined that London should see him no more. The only obstacle to such a decision was his Commissionership of Bankrupts, the income derivable from which, although small, was to him far from unimportant. But peace of mind was the first consideration. Under a conscientious feeling of incompetency he resigned his office, and thus severed the last link which bound him to the law and the metropolis. That step taken, he

requested his brother to seek out an abode for him in the neighbourhood of Cambridge, where his brother was now fixed by a fellowship at Benet or Corpus Christi College. A suitable dwelling could not be found nearer than at Huntingdon, fifteen miles from Cambridge. The distance was greater than was desirable, and the neighbourhood of the fens extremely hazardous for such an invalid as Cowper had been; but time had run on quickly since his recovery; he had now been a year and a half at St. Alban's, and his circumstances required a less expensive way of life. On the 17th June, 1765, he quitted Dr. Cotton with reluctance, and with uncomfortable expectations of the accommodations he should meet with at Huntingdon. After four days passed at Cambridge, his brother inducted him into his new abode, and left him, surrounded by strangers in a strange place.

The experiment seemed singularly perilous. It was indeed a touchstone of the reality of his recovery. His spirits sank the moment his brother left him, and he felt, he says, like a traveller in the midst of an inhospitable desert, without friend or guide. Fortunately he had brought with him an attached servant, who had waited upon him and watched over him at St. Alban's during his whole illness. This young lad had pleaded hard to be permitted to follow Cowper's fortunes, and he had with some difficulty prevailed on Dr. Cotton to part with him. The boy rewarded Cowper with long and faithful service, and at this first moment of his renewed solitariness, must have been of infinite use to him. "The Turkish Spy," remarks

Cowper, "says that he kept no servant because he would not have an enemy in his house; I hired mine because I would have a friend."

Cowper struggled hard against the incipient feeling of loneliness. He traversed the surrounding neighbourhood in walks, he drew by constant prayer upon the new strength which had been given him, he attended sedulously upon the daily services in Huntingdon Church, and on the second day after his arrival at Huntingdon, the first day being a Sunday, he began that correspondence with his friends which would have made his name conspicuous in literature, had he never written the "Task."

His first letter was addressed to his friend Hill; a week afterwards he wrote to his cousin Harriet, now become the wife of Sir Thomas Hesketh; he wrote also to Martin Madan; and in due time he availed himself of an opportunity to open a new correspondence with the wife of his relative and intended patron, Major Cowper, who was a sister of Martin Madan, and Cowper's cousin, therefore, by a double relationship. His correspondence with Hill, although often extremely humourous, was principally about business, and was continued with more or less frequency as long as he wrote letters to any one; that with Lady Hesketh was maintained on Cowper's side very hotly for a little while, but although ever most kind to him, and deeply interested in his welfare, she had no sympathy with his religious feelings, which were now conspicuous in all his letters. In a little while the correspondence flagged, and on her leaving

England shortly afterwards with her husband, it wholly ceased for many years. His other cousin, Mrs. Cowper, entered warmly into his religious views. She was not regarded by him with the same strong affection that he felt towards Lady Hesketh, but she called forth some of his most confidential letters, and was a kind and pleasing correspondent for several years.

The occupation he created for himself was sufficient to prevent the immediate approach of melancholy. With the friendliness common among residents in country places, several of his new neighbours called upon him. Two families, in particular, treated him with as much cordiality as if their pedigrees and his own had "grown upon the same sheep-skin," and he formed acquaintance with three or four single men, "odd, scrambling fellows like himself," who suited his temper to a hair. The Ouse offered him great facilities for bathing; books were freely lent to him, and also the *St. James's Chronicle;* he arranged a weekly meeting with his brother, alternately at Cambridge and at Huntingdon, which compelled him, somewhat against his will, to become a horseman; he rose early, ranged the country round in frequent rambles, and at six o'clock in the morning was to be met with at "a fountain of very fine water about a mile from the town, which is reckoned extremely like the Bristol spring." He had even the pleasure of receiving his friend Hill at his lodgings for a brief visit, being the only occasion on which he saw any of his London friends for many years. For three

months his new situation pleased him exceedingly; he "was much happier than the day was long," but the approach of winter, the loss of novelty, and the wearing away of excitement, changed the aspect of everything. Before the end of the fourth month he began to dislike his solitary situation, and to fear that he "should never be able to weather out the winter in so lonely a dwelling."

Just at this time, when the irksomeness of his retirement began to press upon him, and would infallibly have driven him back to St. Alban's, a way was opened to a new arrangement, which supplied everything that was needful for his happiness. The great want of his life had hitherto been a home. What he had needed was not the independence of a lodging, or of a set of chambers, but a residence in which he should form one of a family circle, having united interests and occupations, pleasures, sympathies, and sorrows. It pleased Providence at this time to open the way for his becoming one in such an association. In a place like Huntingdon, the advent of a stranger of gentlemanly manners and appearance, coming without introduction, occupying a solitary lodging, and making himself conspicuous principally by a constant attendance at the daily service in the church, would not fail to excite attention and create interest. Among the persons whom his countenance—conspicuously mild, intelligent, and thoughtful—attracted towards him, was a young man named William Cawthorne Unwin, who had just taken his A.B. degree at Cambridge, and whose parents and only sister resided at Hunting-

don. Unwin felt a strong inclination to call upon Cowper, but was dissuaded by his mother, who had heard that the stranger had no inclination for society, which, in the ordinary sense of the word society, was the fact. In spite of objections and arguments, Unwin persevered, and perceiving Cowper, one day after morning prayer, taking a solitary walk under a row of trees, he approached and accosted him. Cowper received the attentions of the good-looking young man not merely with courtesy but with kindness. Delighted with his success, Unwin invited himself to drink tea with his new friend that afternoon. They opened their hearts to each other, and friendship was the immediate result. An appointment was made for Cowper to call on Unwin at his father's house. He did so. In the temporary absence of the rest of the family he had a *tête-à-tête* with Miss Unwin, a handsome girl of eighteen, whose cheerful easy manners and pleasant conversation confirmed the favourable impression produced by her brother. On the Sunday following he dined with them. The frank ingenuousness of the son and daughter had attracted him, the same quality in the parents completed the conquest. The father, Morley Unwin, a clergyman verging on old age, is described by Cowper as a man of learning and good sense, and as simple as Parson Adams; but the gem of the house was his wife, Mary Unwin, a name which Cowper has made known for all time and throughout the world. She was considerably younger than her husband, a person of handsome presence and bearing, entirely unaffected, with a

sweet, serene countenance, manners "more polite than a duchess," and above all things in the estimation of Cowper, a lively friendliness in conversation and action, and a total absence of ceremonious civility. These were qualities which Cowper never could withstand. Any where they would have attracted him, but in such a family, and in the degree to which they were possessed by Mrs. Unwin, they were irresistible; and when, in her gentle, placid way, she led him to speak upon subjects of religion, and he found that their views were perfectly in unison—that, as he expresses himself, they had one faith, and had been baptized with the same baptism—his whole heart was won. He wondered that he could ever have liked Huntingdon so well before this bright light shone across his path, and thought he should now find every place disagreeable that had not an Unwin belonging to it.

The liking, as in most such cases, was mutual. The Unwins pitied Cowper's loneliness, were delighted with his strong intelligence, and enjoyed the pleasant vein of humour which ran through all his conversation. No one could laugh more heartily than Mrs. Unwin; and Cowper, we may be sure, although no great talker, gave her frequent opportunities of doing so. The Unwins were also truly religious people, and in their conversation was interwoven a marked and continual reference to topics of a sacred character. They would naturally be well pleased with one who entered into their feelings on this subject, and Cowper, in the fervour of his first love, must have

felt it a joy to be emancipated, whilst with them, from the restraints necessarily imposed upon such allusions in general society.

The previous history of these worthy people is a tale soon told. Mr. Unwin had been master of the free school and lecturer at the two churches in Huntingdon for many years. The income from these occupations was insufficient to maintain a wife, but Unwin lived in hope of obtaining a college living, and in the meantime secured an interest in the heart of Mary Cawthorne, a daughter of a draper at Ely. In due time the college living of Grimstone, in Norfolk, fell vacant. Unwin was presented, and his marriage followed. Grimstone disappointed them. Mrs. Unwin, it is said, disliked the place and the society. They returned to Huntingdon, where Unwin took a large house in the High-street, and prepared pupils for Cambridge. It was in this house that Cowper visited them.

The intimacy grew rapidly on both sides. The elder Unwin drove Cowper over to Cambridge on his fortnightly visits to his brother; their house was open to him at all times; Mrs. Unwin and he held long conversations on subjects of religion, conversations which, as he affirms, and no doubt truly, did him more good than he could have received from an audience of the first prince in Europe. His shyness somewhat interfered with his full use of the privileges thus opened to him, but their value was not the less duly appreciated; and when he began to feel the wearisomeness of his lodging, the thought suggested itself whether he might not

find a place among the Unwins as a boarder. A pupil had just left for Cambridge, might he not succeed to his vacant place? The suggestion was warmly responded to by the Unwins, and on the 11th November, 1765, Cowper entered what was to him truly a harbour of refuge.

Before he did so, he had given a new proof of the difficulty he found in living alone. In three months, "by the help of good management, and a clear notion of economical matters, he contrived to spend the income of a twelvemonth." From such results of inexperience he would in future be in great part protected by his arrangement with the Unwins, which was based upon a stipulated payment per annum for board and lodging. His money matters were at this time in most unsatisfactory plight. His own income had been reduced to a comparative pittance, and he was in considerable debt to Dr. Cotton. Various members of his family kindly came to his assistance, and apparently without consulting him, agreed among themselves to make certain annual payments on his account into the hands of the ever kind and useful Hill. He had been but a few months established at the Unwins when his uncle Ashley intimated to him, in a letter couched in the very gentlest terms, that the contributors to this supplementary fund were not a little displeased to find that he incurred what seemed to them the very unnecessary expense of not merely keeping the servant who has been before mentioned, but that he had also brought with him from St. Alban's another claimant upon his bounty, a destitute child, of whom he had

taken upon himself the care. The facts were certainly as stated. Whilst at St. Alban's, and probably under the advice of Dr. Cotton, who might deem such an exercise of sympathy likely to be conducive to his recovery, Cowper assumed the charge of an infant boy, the offspring of profligate parents. He sent the child to a school at Huntingdon, transferred him to Olney on his own removal thither, and finally settled him as an apprentice at Oundle, in Northamptonshire. When a young man, it may be stated at once, in order to dismiss the subject from our notice, this *protégé* of the poet fixed himself at Olney, and married a servant of Mrs. Unwin. It does not appear that Cowper's good intentions towards him conduced to a satisfactory result. A correspondence upon this subject ensued with his uncle, in which Cowper, with the dislike of dictation which was an essential part of his character, declined to yield to the remonstrances of his friends, although warned that, if he persisted, there was danger of the withdrawal of at least some of the family contributions. Nothing, however, came of this threat. On reconsideration, the objectors left him at liberty to do as he pleased; and the subject would have been scarcely worthy of notice in a mere rapid outline of his biography, but that it brought him what was probably the first of several private communications from his cousin Theodora. Whilst the disagreeable correspondence was pending, he received, he states, an anonymous letter, in a hand which at first seemed entirely strange to him. "It was conceived," he goes on, writing

to Lady Hesketh, "in the kindest and most benevolent terms imaginable, exhorting me not to distress myself with fears lest the threatened event should take place; for that, whatever deduction of my income might happen, the defect should be supplied by a person who loved me tenderly, and approved my conduct. I wish I knew who dictated this letter. I have seen, not long since, a style most excessively like it." This account of the anonymous letter was written nearly twenty years after the event to which it alludes, and with an assumed air of mystification. Cowper evidently wished Lady Hesketh to suppose that he believed her to be his anonymous friend. Probably, on consideration of other similar communications, which will be mentioned hereafter, it will be deemed more likely that it came from Theodora. It should be added that on this occasion his new friends were by no means outdone in generosity by his old. To quiet his mind, during the discussion of this disagreeable subject, although apparently treated by Cowper with the wonderful *nonchalance* which he exhibited in reference to all pecuniary matters, Mrs. Unwin assured him that, in case the contemplated reduction of his income should ensue, his place under their roof would still be open to him, with all the same accommodation (and she undertook to manage that matter with her husband) at half the stipulated payment.

The year and a half which followed his removal to the Unwins was one of the calmest and happiest periods of his life. At ease among friends who delighted in his society, and in whom he delighted,

spending much of his time in religious services[1] and conversation, and in walks through a country which was made beautiful by the pleasure he felt in the society of his companions, the time passed quickly, but not without change. Young Unwin left home for a curacy, and his sister married the Rev. Matthew Powley, afterwards vicar of Dewsbury in Yorkshire. These removals considerably changed the character of the household, and were soon followed by another which destroyed it altogether. On the 28th of June, 1767, on a Sunday morning, the elder Mr.

[1] The following is his own account of the way in which his days were ordinarily spent:—"We breakfast commonly between eight and nine; till eleven, we read either the Scriptures, or the sermons of some faithful preacher of those holy mysteries; at eleven, we attend divine service, which is performed here twice every day; and from twelve to three we separate, and amuse ourselves as we please. During that interval I either read in my own apartment, or walk or ride, or work in the garden. We seldom sit an hour after dinner, but, if the weather permits, adjourn to the garden, where, with Mrs. Unwin and her son, I have generally the pleasure of religious conversation till tea-time. If it rains, or is too windy for walking, we either converse within doors, or sing some hymns of Martin's collection, and by the help of Mrs. Unwin's harpsichord make up a tolerable concert, in which our hearts, I hope, are the best and most musical performers. After tea, we sally forth to walk in good earnest. Mrs. Unwin is a good walker, and we have generally travelled about four miles before we see home again. When the days are short we make this excursion in the former part of the day, between church-time and dinner. At night, we read and converse as before till supper, and commonly finish the evening either with hymns or a sermon, and last of all the family are called to prayers. I need not tell *you* that such a life as this is consistent with the utmost cheerfulness; accordingly we are all happy, and dwell together in unity as brethren."

Unwin was riding from Huntingdon towards Gravely, a parish in the neighbourhood, of which he was curate. He was suddenly thrown from his horse, and the back part of his skull was fractured. He was carried, speechless and senseless, into a poor cottage near the scene of the accident, and there died on the following Thursday evening.

Again the question of change of residence presented itself to the mind of Cowper, but it was settled this time almost as soon as raised. The house which Mrs. Unwin occupied in Huntingdon was now altogether disproportioned to her wants and means. She determined to remove to one more suitable, and, according to the statement of Hayley, "generously requested" Cowper, whom he terms "the interesting recluse," to "continue under her care." This may have been the case, but is probably not the whole truth. Cowper on his recovery, and the change in his religious feelings, had a strong desire to go into the Church. The idea was very properly abandoned; but now, when a great change must necessarily be made, it was very likely to occur to him that if he were living in the parish of some active evangelical clergyman, with whom he was upon friendly terms, apart from the comfort and satisfaction which Mrs. Unwin and he would derive from his ministry, he himself might be serviceable to such a clergyman as a voluntary lay assistant. Such a position, next to the ministry itself, would be most agreeable to him, and would give him that which he so much needed, something of an occupation. Nobody would fall into such a plan more

willingly than Mrs. Unwin, and consequently we find that, on determining to remove from Huntingdon, the selection of their place of future residence was made to turn upon their desire to be in connexion with some clergyman of the required character. A circumstance, which happened most opportunely, favoured their views, and determined their choice. Dr. Conyers, of Helmsley in Yorkshire, and afterwards of Deptford, when visiting Cambridge to take his doctor's degree, formed an acquaintance with young Unwin, and learnt from him something of the religious character of his mother. Dr. Conyers was one of the clergymen towards whom Mrs. Unwin and Cowper looked as likely to assist them in relation to a residence, but it so happened that in writing some time previously to the celebrated John Newton, of Olney, Conyers had mentioned what he had heard of Mrs. Unwin, and had advised Newton to call upon her when he chanced to be at Huntingdon. He did so. The visit took place within a few days after the death of Mr. Unwin. He was attracted to her and Cowper by all he saw and heard, and they to him by his cordial sympathy. They explained their views for the future. He promised his assistance, and had no difficulty, on his return to Olney, in procuring for them, as a residence, half of a large well-built brick house, situate in the Market-place of that town. It required repair and alteration (probably division, so that the proprietor might let the portion not occupied by Cowper and Mrs. Unwin to some other family) and these operations demanded two or three months for their

accomplishment. For the meantime, Newton offered them a home in his own residence, a friendly proposal of which, being obliged to remove from their house in Huntingdon, they willingly availed themselves.

Cowper knew nothing of Olney, and probably Newton knew, at that time, next to nothing of Cowper's previous history. Neither of them, therefore, deserves blame, beyond that which attaches to some little inconsiderateness, for the selection of Olney as the residence of a person with Cowper's predispositions. In some respects, it was almost as dangerous a place for him as could have been chosen. On the south and east runs the Ouse, a considerable river, which, in wet weather, and in the winter season, disdains the confinement of its banks, and spreads itself far and wide over meadows, which it converts into an extensive swamp. The results may be inferred. Whilst the valley is covered with water, the whole neighbourhood is cold and damp; when the irrigation subsides, there remains on the land a marshy deposit, which becomes a fruitful source of fever, ague, and many other depressing maladies. Nor did the town itself derive any compensation for its other disadvantages, from the character of its population, or from the cheerfulness of its society. The poorer inhabitants, mostly dependent on that most miserable of occupations in England, lace-making, were sordidly poor, and among the other residents in the town there was no one with whom an educated person could live upon terms of intimate association, except the

curate of the parish, the vicar being an absentee.

"One parson, one poet, one bellman, one crier,"

were, many years afterwards, declared by Cowper to be the sole functionaries of this little community, and he added that he himself, who was usually designated "Sir Cowper" by the lower classes, had then risen in popular estimation to a dignity which was an evidence of how much the place was shunned and neglected by people of any station:

"And the poor poet is the only squire."

But to be near Newton, who was the curate alluded to, was the only consideration which influenced Mrs. Unwin and Cowper, and truly not without reason. His merits were not then, perhaps, fully understood, but he was one of the memorable people of his period. His published Narrative had thrown a romantic interest around his early life, and personally he was a man of ardent piety and of no mean poetical talent, active in the work of reviving evangelical religion in the Church of England, a theologian of considerable power, in his general views peculiarly liberal and enlightened, and in his natural character warm-hearted and affectionate in the highest degree. He was now at the age of forty-two, whilst Cowper was thirty-six, and Mrs. Unwin forty-three.

The party from Huntingdon arrived at Olney in September, 1767. Within a few weeks afterwards Newton and his wife moved into the Vicarage, probably from a lodging, and there they all took

up their abode, and remained together until the 9th December following. The period was long enough to try the hastily-formed friendship which had thus suddenly brought them under one roof. It stood the test triumphantly. Newton wrote thus to a friend on the day of their removal:—"We are much as usual in all respects, only our friends talk of removing to their own house to-day; it looks awkward, and we feel somehow as if they were going to the West Indies. We have lived so long together that we cannot separate without some reluctance. It is the Lord that makes people of one mind in a house, and I am sure He has given us this mercy, so that the longer and more intimate our acquaintance has been, we have been the more united; and though Satan has been busy enough with us in other ways, I do not know or believe that he was ever suffered to whisper the least thought to either of us that might occasion shyness or displeasure for a single moment, from the first day we saw each other."

Cowper found Newton in the midst of the good works incident to the life of a clergyman, in a parish of 2,000 people, about 1,200 of whom, most of them "the half-starved and ragged of the earth," were poor nervous creatures, suffering from lowness of diet, from the confinement and want of exercise incidental to their occupation as lace-makers, and from frequent fevers arising from malaria. In the alleviation of the miseries of these people Newton was indefatigable, and although his own means, and that of the curacy, were totally insufficient for the purpose, he was

fortunately relieved from the necessity of working among them without having a fund at his disposal, by the liberality of one of the most charitable people of his time. Mr. Thornton, a wealthy merchant, "the common patron of every useful and pious endeavour," was attracted towards Newton by the perusal of the narrative of his early life. He formed a personal acquaintance with him, visited him at Olney, made him a constant annual remittance, and charged him in something of the style, if not with the authority of a bishop: "Be hospitable; keep open house for such as are worthy of entertainment; help the poor and needy; I will statedly allow you £200 a-year, and readily send whatever you have occasion to draw for more." Provided with means, Newton worked with zeal, but with an affection for his people scarcely sufficiently discriminating. Over-trust in the representations of applicants for charity, especially when they assumed the garb of religion—a great fault in an administrator of pecuniary relief—was Newton's failing. His talent, as has been remarked, did not lie in the "discerning of spirits," and his weakness in this respect of course multiplied the demands upon him, and rendered his labour the more urgent and oppressive.

All the ordinary instruments of parish management then in use were zealously worked by him. Schools, visitation of the sick, administration of relief, prayer meetings, and the usual public but not daily services at the church, gave him constant occupation. It was in such a life that Cowper, after a time, began to take his part. "He loved the

poor," remarked Newton; "he often visited them in their cottages, conversed with them, sympathised with them, counselled and comforted them in their distresses, and those who were seriously disposed were often cheered and animated by his prayers." Mr. Thornton supplied him with a sum for charitable distribution, which made his work easier and his visits more acceptable. He even, it is said, not merely attended prayer-meetings, but took his share in leading the devotional exercises, and on such occasions poured out his heart in earnest intercession, with a devotion equally simple, sublime, and fervent. His intimacy with Newton continued as close and friendly as can be conceived. Interruption there was none. Not even a cloud intervened between them. Newton says they were seldom separated when at home and awake, and that he passed the first six years of Cowper's residence at Olney in daily admiring and striving to imitate him. Cowper, on his part, regarded Newton with an almost infinite affection and respect. Friendship purer or more entire, closer or more uninterrupted, has seldom subsisted between man and man. Newton thus speaks of it:—

> "I had a friend beloved, and well we knew
> Union of heart, confiding, fond, and true.
> We dwelt together, and I watched him still
> An untired pilgrim towards the heavenly hill,
> A soldier 'mid a troop of hostile foes,
> A Christian, finding 'neath the cross repose;
> I watched him, and admired when lowly bent,
> He owned the cup of grief in mercy sent."

In these last words may be an allusion to what

was Cowper's greatest grief at this period of his life, namely, the death of his brother. John Cowper had now become a fellow of his college, and incumbent of Foxton in Cambridgeshire. In the University he was highly regarded as a man of learning, and not less so, both there and elsewhere, on account of his singularly amiable temper and most candid disposition ;—

> " Peace to the memory of a man of worth,
> A man of letters, and of manners too!
> Of manners sweet as virtue always wears,
> When gay good-humour dresses her in smiles."

In September, 1769, Cowper was summoned to Cambridge, by tidings of his brother's serious illness, which originated in cold and fever caught on his return from a journey into Wales. He partially recovered, but was attacked, in the following February, with asthma and dropsy. Cowper, again summoned to attend him, remained in close and anxious watchfulness, for more than a month, but the case was hopeless from the first. When Cowper arrived in Cambridge on the second occasion, he found the patient quite ignorant of his state of danger. Such was his easy, placid character, that he submitted without a murmur to his severe afflictions, but seemed almost to take it for granted that he should soon be well again. It was Cowper's wish to lead him, not so much to a knowledge of the truth in reference to his bodily condition, as to that higher and holier truth, the way to life eternal. Most kindly and gently did the now experienced Christian brother draw him

on. His understanding gradually opened, his prejudices subsided, and ultimately the light of Heaven streamed into his heart. The one interpreter unlocked for him the mysteries of the Gospel. Accepting joyfully the great salvation, and sharing the faith of his brother—that faith which had previously been a subject of ridicule to both of them—he joined the multitude which no man can number, on the 20th March, 1770, at the age of thirty-three.

It was thought better that Cowper should not attend the funeral; but sorrowful and yet rejoicing, now the sole survivor of his family, he returned from Cambridge to his constant friends and his works of usefulness at Olney. There he ever found the same cheerful and affectionate tenderness in Mrs. Unwin, and the same large-hearted friendliness in Newton. Shortly after this time he added another to his Christian labours, and one which was the more important, as directly leading the way to some of the most successful efforts of his genius. Newton, like many other clergymen, had found the want, from time to time, of other hymns for use in public and private services, than those, however beautiful, which have been inherited from the Church of the Hebrews. Under circumstances of strong feeling, Cowper had already several times thrown his prayers and aspirations into the form of hymns. The frightful delusion which drove him to St. Alban's found expression in poetry, but it was in an ode of most awful character. No sooner had his mind resumed its proper action, no sooner had

his heart owned the power of grace, than his thoughts again took the form of poetry. Even whilst under the care of Dr. Cotton, and probably by his encouragement, the walls of the asylum echoed to hymns dictated by gratitude for the happy change which the poor maniac experienced, and by his determination to pass henceforth a life of religious retirement. At Olney, new occasions arose for the exercise of his talent in hymn-writing. The prayer-meeting to which allusion has already been made, was removed to a larger room in what was called the Great House, an ancient mansion which stood between the church and the lower part of the town, but has since been taken down. Cowper wrote his beautiful hymn beginning—

> "Jesus, where'er thy people meet,
> There they behold thy mercy-seat;
> Where'er they seek thee, thou art found,
> And every place is hallowed ground"—

for the opening of this place of worship, and other hymns were prompted by passing circumstances, both personal and local. Newton estimated Cowper's power in this respect rightly, and was stirred up by it to imitation :—

> "I heard him and admired, for he could bring
> From his soft harp such strains as angels sing,
> Could tell of free salvation, grace and love,
> Till angels listened from their homes above;
> I woke my lyre to join his rapturous strain,
> We sang together of the Lamb once slain."

Thus began and thus grew the collection termed the Olney Hymns. The number which had been

written was probably considerable before the idea of forming such a volume as they now present occurred to either of the authors; and when at length that design suggested itself—most likely to Newton, for the arrangement smacks more of the clergyman than of the poet—there was joined with it an anxiety to make the little volume "a monument to perpetuate the remembrance of an intimate and endeared friendship." In all respects the volume answered its purpose. It contains hymns by both its authors, which have found their way into almost every collection in congregational or personal use, and it has spread wide the knowledge, even to the ends of the earth, of the friendship of which it was designed to be a memorial.

For six years, from 1767 to 1773, that friendship continued without a flaw, the Olney Hymns proceeded prosperously, and all the good works for which Mr. Thornton provided the means. At the end of that time Cowper's health failed. In January, 1773, he again became insane. His malady was essentially of the same character as on the previous occasion. "I was suddenly reduced," he remarked, writing in 1786, "from my wonted rate of understanding to an almost childish imbecility. I did not lose my senses, but I lost the power to exercise them. I could return a rational answer even to a difficult question, but a question was necessary, or I never spoke at all. This state of mind was accompanied, as I suppose it to be in most instances of the kind, with misapprehension of things and persons, that

made me a very intractable patient. I believed that everybody hated me, and that Mrs. Unwin hated me most of all; was convinced that all my food was poisoned, together with ten thousand megrims of the same stamp." But these megrims were not the worst part of his malady. It took in addition, and as before, a religious form. He imbibed the persuasion that it was the Divine will that he should imitate Abraham's faith and offer up a sacrifice, and that that sacrifice should be himself. The watchfulness of Mrs. Unwin prevented the execution of this purpose on, at any event, two occasions. He instantly converted her care into fresh poison. Having failed to obey the presumed command of God, he believed himself to be thenceforth irrevocably sentenced to everlasting condemnation. What he deemed to be his peculiar sin rendered his case altogether peculiar and exceptional. According to his own view, he was the only person that ever lived who, having believed with the heart unto righteousness, was yet, by God's just decree, excluded from a participation in salvation. To these fancies, so wild and dreadful, his friends sometimes opposed the principles which he had firmly believed, and which in the midst of all his madness he still continued to believe. His answer was: "'Tis all true. Those principles forbid the happening of anything of the kind in your case, or in the case of any other person, but with me it is not so. My sin and my judgment are alike peculiar. I am a castaway, deserted and condemned." With melancholy consistency he abandoned all attendance

upon public or domestic worship, and even all attempts at private prayer. Many years after the time when this wildness came upon him he was earnestly entreated to resume his participation in acts of prayer and praise. He replied: "There is not a man upon earth that might not be the better for it, myself only excepted. Prove to me that I have a right to pray, and I will pray without ceasing. You will think me mad, but I am not mad, most noble Festus, I am only in despair." He even contended that for him to implore mercy would be an additional offence, an opposition to the determinate counsel of God.

Among the ten thousand megrims to which we have found him alluding, one was a dislike to enter the rectory, that house which, in times past, he had visited familiarly at all hours, and which he describes himself as having watched, that he might see, by the smoke from a particular chimney, when Newton was at home and in his study. For a long time no persuasion could induce him to cross the threshold. At length Mrs. Unwin, no doubt with delight, esteeming it a favourable symptom, prevailed upon him to agree to spend a day there. He went accordingly, and then no persuasion could induce him to quit. He begged, and wept, and pleaded to stay with such earnestness, that, inconvenient as it was, it was necessarily submitted to for fourteen months. At the end of that time he suddenly determined to return, and when he had once consented was in haste to be gone.

Throughout the long duration of this second illness, Mrs. Unwin was his sole attendant, for at the same time that he was convinced of her aversion to him, he could endure no other companion. Their feelings towards each other had greatly changed within the last few years. At Huntingdon, as a wife, and the mistress of a household comprising several young men, she had treated him much as she did all other persons who were domiciled under her roof, with a kind of matronly regard and superintendence. Her solicitude for his happiness, unlike anything of which he had before been the subject, and faintly recalling the days of his long-lost mother, excited in him a novel feeling of delight, whilst the excellence of her counsels, the unvarying cheerfulness of her conversation, and the unaffected ease of her manners, strengthened her influence and increased his admiration. On the removal to Olney they were thrown into far different relations. Forming by themselves one household, for the maintenance of which both threw their means into a common purse; passing their time principally in the closest association; reading together, or rather Cowper reading aloud whilst Mrs. Unwin was engaged in some ordinary female occupation; walking together, and finding a chief part of their happiness in the mutual communication of the little incidents of life, it was inevitable that their attachment should become of a more tender kind. Cowper's oddities, weaknesses, infirmities—all that he had gone through and all that was likely to recur—only rendered Mrs. Unwin more devotedly

attached to him, made her watch him the more narrowly, and guard him the more affectionately. When his mental illness returned, Mrs. Unwin's anxiety was extreme. What was to be done with him? Who was to have the care of him? Was he to go again to St. Alban's, to be thrown among strangers, or to be left alone to her? She earnestly entreated that the last of these might be the alternative adopted. How, or by whom, the question was in the first instance resolved, does not appear, but Cowper declared that he had often heard her say that if ever she praised God in her life, it was when she found that she was to have all the labour. "A terrible task she had," are Cowper's own words; "she performed it, however, with a cheerfulness hardly ever equalled on such an occasion." We have before seen that at least on two occasions she frustrated his attempts to commit suicide, attempts which must have redoubled her vigilance. Night and day were devoted to attendance upon him. She sacrificed comfort, health, and had it been necessary, would have sacrificed life to serve him.

The miseries suffered by the poor patient were incalculable. Newton says that for six years he himself walked pensively with his afflicted friend "in the valley of the shadow of death," and beheld him when mentally agonised by doubts, fears, and terrors, which deprived him alike of peace on earth and hope of heaven. For many months he was totally incapable of any employment. Absorbed in mental anguish, he brooded in silence over his imaginary woes. The first symptom of

improvement was that he began to take notice of the state of trees and shrubs growing in Newton's garden, and thence proceeded to occupy himself in gardening, talking freely about whatever gardening work was in hand. The next step in advance was taken after the lapse of a fortnight. When feeding Newton's chickens—for he now began to busy himself in anything that was out of doors, but on the premises—some little incident made him smile. "I am pretty sure," remarked Newton, who intently watched his progress, "it was the first smile that has been seen upon his face for more than sixteen months." On his return home from Newton's residence, he took to carpentering, making cupboards, boxes, stools, and hutches or houses for his famous hares, Puss, Tiny, and Bess, the care of whom, with the study of their habits and characters, was a great amusement to him for many years. He also kept birds and made cages for them; and in frames, made and glazed by his own hand, he reared seedling pine plants, sent him by the gardener of his neighbour, Mr. Wright of Gayhurst. At one time his stock of live animals consisted, besides the three hares, of five rabbits, two guinea pigs, many pigeons, a magpie, a jay, and a starling, two goldfinches, two canary birds, two dogs, and a squirrel. In November, 1776, he wrote to his friend Hill, for the first time for more than three years, principally in reply to a letter about an illness of his uncle, Mr. Ashley Cowper. During 1777, there was a little revival of his fondness for literature, which occasioned a few letters to Hill for the loan

of books. In July, 1778, he opened a correspondence with his friend William Unwin, now rector of Stock-cum-Belhouse, in Essex, and about the same time also he began to go abroad occasionally with Mrs. Unwin, but carefully, lest he should meet any of his neighbours, and in that case, running up any turning out of the road, or adopting any other subterfuge to avoid them. The last of the occupations into which he forced himself, in order to keep down melancholy thoughts, was landscape drawing, his passion for which lasted some months. He drew, he says, mountains, valleys, woods, streams, and ducks and dab-chicks. "I admire them myself," he remarks, "and Mrs. Unwin admires them, and her praise and my praise put together are fame enough for me." In all these compulsory employments he worked heartily for a time. "So long as I am pleased," he says, "I am capable of unwearied application, because my feelings are all of the intense kind. I never received a *little* pleasure from anything in my life; if I am delighted it is in the extreme. The unhappy consequence of this temperature is, that my attachment to any occupation seldom outlives the novelty of it. The nerve of my imagination, that feels the touch of any particular amusement, twangs under the energy of the pressure with so much vehemence, that it soon becomes sensible of weariness and fatigue." The temporary success of these various occupations was altogether the result of the vehemence with which he pursued them. The moment the work lost its interest it became useless, and on its abandonment the hide-

ous phantasms which peopled his idle brain resumed their melancholy sway.

This second illness of Cowper has been made a subject of contention, especially with reference to the conduct of Newton, and the influence of his advice and management upon the health of his friend. We shall not enter upon this battle-field of party, but lest it should be thought that we have overlooked it, we will briefly point out a few of those considerations which have occurred to us.

That Cowper was in the first instance driven mad by over-much religion, which at one time was the prevalent belief, we consider to be certainly a mistake. His madness, it will have been seen, was rather occasioned by want of religion than by excess of it, and the reception of definite views of Christianity, although it did not work his cure, exercised, on his first recovery, a very beneficial effect upon his health, both of body and mind.

But it has been thought that the works of charity, the religious services, and the writing of hymns, in which he was engaged by Newton at Olney, were too much for him, and that his second attack was produced by the manner in which his brain was thus overtasked. Without entering into the question of the amount of excitement comprehended in these labours, it is clear that in Cowper's case, for the long period of six years, they constituted the joy of his life. They were his occupation, his principal sources of interest, the main ingredients in his happiness, and for

that period they were indulged in without injury to his health. At the end of that period, either circumstances which are unknown to us, and which may have been quite unconnected with the labours in question, brought about his relapse, or Cowper, in his impetuosity, of which we have just had evidence, occasioned that relapse by abuse of his powers. By an over-dose, he may have converted mental stimulant, some portion of which was really wholesome, into poison; but surely the six years' experience proves that, in themselves, these things might in his case be perfectly safe. Unless we are prepared to doom those who have ever suffered from an attack of mania to perpetual misery, by excluding them from all participation in those affairs of life which are interesting to them, we ought to hesitate before we censure Newton for having put in Cowper's way the means of usefulness and of happiness which he desired, and which were the only ones open to him.

It has been further said that more caution should have been used. We do not know what caution was used. We have no information on the subject. There may have been much caution, very likely there was, at first, but six years is a long period, quite long enough to have justified the opinion that his health was permanently established, and to have excused and vindicated considerable relaxation of caution. Besides, be it remembered that mental labour can be carried on without outward show, and is therefore utterly incapable of control by any one save the labourer

himself. The silence of the night may be devoted, not to its natural purpose, but to fancied scenes of ineffable joy or terror, to the solution of abstruse calculations, or to the stringing together of stanzas of piety or of mirth; the solitary chamber is study wide enough for the consideration of the loftiest problem ever submitted to human thought, and whilst all the world imagines that the occupant of that chamber is wooing tired nature's soft restorer, his mind may be racked by doubts or tortured by despair. How little, in such cases, can be effected by the caution of others! Nor is it easy to see, with respect to Cowper's second attack, in what manner any peculiar degree of caution could have been applied. There was no premonition. In Cowper's words, which have been already quoted, and which contain all that we know upon the subject, he says that he was reduced to an almost childish imbecility "suddenly," that is, without warning, in attacks of insanity not an unfrequent case. What then could have been effected by caution?

Again, it has been said that his treatment after the attack was injudicious, and that Newton depended for his recovery not upon means but upon miracle. In these days, it is scarcely ever possible to say that the treatment of insane persons ninety years ago was altogether judicious. People had not then the clear views upon the subject which prevail among ourselves. But it should be borne in mind, in reference to what was done in Cowper's case, that the attack came on in the depth of winter, when in that country out-of-doors exer-

cise was suspended, and travelling was not easy.[1] Neither Mrs. Unwin nor Newton had seen Cowper in his previous attack, and Cowper himself, it may be added, was prejudiced and obstinate in reference to the use of medicines. An apothecary was employed—the usual, perhaps the only, medical means at Olney—and after a time, five months, —certainly too long a time—Newton went over to St. Alban's on several occasions to consult Dr. Cotton, who gave directions and received communications from the apothecary. With respect to how far Newton depended on means, and how far on miracle, he thus states his own views:— "I still hope that the Great Physician will cure him, *either by giving a blessing to means*, or immediately by His own hand."

Rumour has assigned many various circumstances as leading up to the recurrence of his malady. Probably none of them with even a shadow of truth. One story is that the noble hymn, "God moves in a mysterious way," was written on the eve of his attack, and led to such excitement as brought it on. We have not found a shadow of evidence in support of this tradition. Equally without foundation is the story that he had offered marriage to Mrs. Unwin and had been accepted, but that excitement consequent upon such an engagement, or anxieties connected with

[1] The nature of the country may be guessed from the following circumstance. An aged resident at Olney, since dead, informed the editor in 1858, that she remembered to have seen Newton walking from the vicarage to the church *in pattens*.

interposed doubts, overthrew his mind. It seems a great pity that they did not marry, but there were no doubt reasons against it with which we are not acquainted. There are none for believing the story of the offer and its consequences.

Whilst his returning reason was gradually evolving itself, first in one direction and then in another, there happened two circumstances of great interest to him. One was the publication of the Olney Hymns, with a preface, in which his connection with the work, and its suspension in consequence of his long indisposition, were openly acknowledged. "My grief and disappointment," remarks Newton, "were great: I hung my harp upon the willows, and for some time thought myself determined to proceed no further without him." Led afterwards to resume the work and then to publish it, he distinguished Cowper's share in the volume from his own by prefixing to each of Cowper's hymns the letter C. Sixty-seven were thus indicated, and one other is alledged to have been written by Cowper, although the authenticating letter was accidentally omitted. The other circumstance before alluded to was Newton's removal from Olney. Mr. Thornton presented him to the rectory of the united parishes of St. Mary Woolnoth and St. Mary Woolchurch Haw, and he left Olney finally early in January, 1780.

The interruption of personal communication so close and intimate as that which had subsisted between Newton and Cowper, was necessarily a great shock to a mind enfeebled by disease, but Cowper bore it without injury. "If I were in a

condition to leave Olney too," he remarked, "I certainly would not stay in it. It is no attachment to the place that binds me here, but an unfitness for every other. I lived in it once, and now am buried in it." Newton watched over him to the last. Next to the duties of his ministry, he made it the business of his life to attend upon his afflicted friend, and on his departure, seeing that there was no person resident in Olney who could in any degree take his place, or with whom Cowper was likely to maintain any kind of friendly intimacy, he overcame his friend's strong reluctance to the sight of new faces, and introduced him to the Rev. William Bull, another friend of Thornton's, who was a schoolmaster, and the minister of a congregation of Independents, at Newport Pagnel. Almost as nervous as Cowper himself, the effort must have been great in Bull to overcome Cowper's shyness, but by the mere force of considerate kindness he gradually won his way, and came at last to be a constant visitor, dining with Cowper regularly once a fortnight, and being used by him as a friend and adviser in a thousand ways. Cowper thus describes him to Unwin:—"You are not acquainted with the Rev. Mr. Bull, of Newport; perhaps it is as well for you that you are not. You would regret still more than you do, that there are so many miles interposed between us. He spends part of the day with us to-morrow. A dissenter, but a liberal one; a man of letters and of genius; master of a fine imagination, or rather not master of it—an imagination which, when he finds himself in the

company he loves, and can confide in, runs away with him into such fields of speculation, as amuse and enliven every other imagination that has the happiness to be of the party. At other times he has a tender and delicate sort of melancholy in his disposition, not less agreeable in its way. No men are better qualified for companions in such a world as this, than men of such a temperament. Every scene of life has two sides, a dark and a bright one, and the mind that has an equal mixture of melancholy and vivacity is best of all qualified for the contemplation of either; it can be lively without levity, and pensive without dejection. Such a man is Mr. Bull. But—he smokes tobacco. Nothing is perfect,—

> '*Nihil est ab omne*
> *Parte beatum.*'"

Cowper's revived interest in literature soon led to literary effort. The stanzas on the promotion of his friend Thurlow to the Chancellorship, the report of the adjudged case between the Eyes and the Nose, and the lines on the burning of Lord Mansfield's library were among his productions at this time. His fondness for landscape drawing subsided much about the time when Newton's removal from Olney increased the necessity for some engrossing home-occupation. The Muse came to his aid, and the delight which he soon learnt to take in the labour of putting her inspirations into proper form, made him inclined to pay her court whenever any incident occurred, public or private, which filled his mind or ex-

cited his imagination. "At this season of the year," he writes in December, 1780, "and in this gloomy uncomfortable climate, it is no easy matter for the owner of a mind like mine to divert it from sad subjects, and fix it upon such as may administer to its amusement. Poetry, above all things, is useful to me in this respect. While I am held in pursuit of pretty images, or a pretty way of expressing them, I forget every thing that is irksome; and like a boy that plays truant, determine to avail myself of the present opportunity to be amused, and to put by the disagreeable recollection that I must, after all, go home and be whipt again."

Thus, after many changes, his mind at length began to run into the course which it pursued for many years. Poetical composition, correspondence, and gardening, these were his daily occupations, his amusements, his delights, the evening being closed with an hour's reading aloud to Mrs. Unwin. The heavy cloud still hung over him. "A black and diseased melancholy," as it was described by Sir Egerton Brydges, "not a grave and rich contemplativeness, possessed him." "My thoughts are clad," he says, "in a sober livery, for the most part as grave as that of a bishop's servants; they turn, too, upon spiritual subjects; but the tallest fellow, and the loudest of them all, is he who is continually crying with a loud voice, '*Actum est de te; periisti!*'" The art of his life was to hide from his thoughts this tallest of the bishop's servants; and nothing did it so effectually as poetical composition. "The quietness and composing

effect of it," as he explained to Newton, after he had had some experience, "was such, and so totally absorbed have I sometimes been in my rhyming occupation, that neither the past nor the future (those themes which to me are so fruitful in regret at other times) had any longer a share in my contemplation."

Mrs. Unwin was quick to discover the excellent effect of literary work upon Cowper's happiness. She stimulated him to perseverance, and urged him, according to the simile of Dr. Johnson, "not to waste his barrel of gunpowder in squibs." Such advice led naturally to the question of a proper subject for a longer poem. She suggested the "Progress of Error." The impetuous workman, delighted with his new occupation, wrought heartily. In three months, he had not only exhausted the suggested subject, but had completed two other poems, "Truth," and "Table Talk." The three contain nearly two thousand lines, which, in that short time, were written, revised, and transcribed, a marvellous proof of a facile pen and a productive mind.

Cowper had been in the habit of dealing with his friends in what he called the way of "poetical export," according to their several characters, and to his particular intimacy with each of them. To Hill he sent every thing legal and every thing political; Unwin got every thing, without exception—light or serious, all went to him; Newton he treated more warily, and thus explained the reason: "If I walked the streets with a fiddle under my arm, I should never think of performing

before the window of a privy councillor, or a chief justice, but should rather make free with ears more likely to be open to such amusement. The trifles I produce in this way are indeed such trifles that I cannot think them seasonable presents for you. Mr. Unwin himself would not be offended if I was to tell him that there is this difference between him and Mr. Newton—that the latter is already an apostle, whilst he himself is only undergoing the business of incubation, with a hope that he may be hatched in due time. When my muse comes forth arrayed in sables, at least in a robe of a graver cast, I make no scruple to direct her to my friend at Hoxton," where Newton had taken up his residence. On the present occasion, the longer poems immediately found their way to Newton, who, apparently of his own good-will, and not in consequence of any previous arrangement with Cowper, took them immediately to Johnson, a publisher in Paternoster-row, the same who had previously published Newton's Narrative. He at once agreed to send them forth into the world. The decision gave the writer infinite delight. He set to work with fresh vigour. "Expostulation," which had hung fire, was completed with renewed spirit; and "Conversation," which was designed for the opening of a new volume, but was ultimately included in the first publication, was soon spun out of the poet's mind. "Truth," whereby Cowper meant religious truth, was the most serious of these productions, and excited some little doubt as to its reception. In those days the distinctive Evangelical doctrines

which Cowper and Newton termed religious truth, were the opinions of a very small minority of the members of the Church of England. A broad clear statement of them by a layman, one who was pleased, if not proud, to describe himself as "of the Inner Temple," was likely to excite the bristles of prejudice. To obviate such a result, or, at any event, to throw over this portion of his work the protection of the clerical character, he applied to Newton for an explanatory preface. The first thought was that such a preface should apply only to "Truth." Whilst Cowper was writing to Newton on the subject, he seems to have seen an awkwardness in prefixing a preface to only one poem out of several, and perhaps it occurred to him that some of the other poems needed excuse on the suggested score scarcely less than "Truth." He therefore enlarged his proposal, and hinted at one preface to the whole; submitting, however, to Newton's judgment with great deference, and entreating him to engage in either of these works, or neither, just as his discretion guided. Newton coquetted a little with the suggestion, but Cowper urged it a second time, admitting the delicacy of the task, but alleging the peculiar capability in that respect of his clerical friend: "You can draw a hair-stroke, where another man would make a blot as broad as a sixpence." Such a compliment was irresistible, and hence arose the preface which is now reprinted in all editions.

All this had been arranged between Cowper and Newton for several months, before a hint of

it was given to Unwin. The way in which Cowper's name was to appear on the title-page, was agreed to on the 5th March, 1781, but it was May-day before he announced the fact to him who had previously been his great poetical confidant. The reasons for the preference of Newton as his agent were obvious. Newton had had experience in the mysteries of publication, which Unwin had not; Newton knew at least one publisher, which was more than could be said of Unwin; Newton lived in London, which Unwin did not. These reasons were conclusive for the selection of Newton, but they afforded no ground whatever for any concealment from Unwin. Cowper, conscious that there was something of unfriendliness in his conduct, wrote to Unwin after a time to communicate the facts, but with obvious restraint. Unwin felt grieved, as Cowper expected he would, but the little tiff soon passed over. Cowper explained, as he should have done at first, and then, once more at ease, he worked away to complete the poems for his volume, and to correct the press. The proofs all passed through Newton's hands, and his criticisms were occasionally useful, but most of the important alterations suggested themselves to the mind of Cowper, and were made in the revises which were regularly sent to him. A cancel in "Expostulation," which is indicated in one of our notes, is worthy of passing mention, on account of the theory which has been founded upon it. It will be seen that a passage, consisting of twenty-four lines, of very severe reflection upon the

Church of Rome, was removed from the text of the poem, and another of equal length substituted in its place. It has been concluded, not unnaturally, that this was a concession to the feelings of his Roman Catholic friends, the Throckmortons. It is due to Cowper's memory to let it be known that he was not influenced by any such feeling. The sheet had not only been returned for press, but had actually been worked off, when the peculiar harshness of the censure occurred to the poet, and made him uneasy. He had before that time regarded the passage with approbation; it now troubled him. For three days, he says, he had no rest in his mind. At length he determined to submit the subject to the judgment of Newton. Newton condemned it, much to the satisfaction of the poet, who rejoiced that, getting rid of these objectionable lines, it would not be in the power of the critics, whatever else they might charge him with, to accuse him of bigotry, "or a design to make a certain denomination of Christians odious, at the hazard of the public peace. I had rather," he continued, "my book were burned, than a single line guilty of such a tendency should escape me." All this took place in November and December, 1781. On the 4th of the latter month he forwarded to Newton the lines to be substituted, with a request that he would deliver them to Johnson, and would at the same time "strike his pen through the offensive passage." By mistake of the binder, some copies of the book got abroad containing the leaf as originally printed, and others with both the original leaf and the one

intended to be substituted for it. The Editor has mentioned in his notes a copy in the former condition, which belonged to Mr. Henry Gough,[1] and Southey had access to a copy which contained both the leaves, which it has been conjectured may have belonged to Mr. Bull. From the facts stated, it must be clear that the removal of this passage originated with Cowper himself, and was effected in December, 1781; it will appear hereafter that his acquaintance with the Throckmortons originated in the spring of 1784.

Cowper's printer, awaiting the return of the London season, which publishers then, as now, delighted to make the period of literary incubation, proceeded far more leisurely than Cowper's anxiety to see himself in print deemed advisable. But the intervening summer and autumn were by no means without their pleasures. Newton and his wife revisited Olney, to the great delight of many people. "When you came," Cowper writes, after the visit had terminated, "I determined as much as possible to be deaf to the suggestions of despair, that if I could contribute but little to the pleasure of the opportunity, I might not dash it with unreasonable melancholy, and like an instrument with a broken string interrupt the harmony of the concert."

The seclusion in which he and Mrs. Unwin lived, thus interrupted for a short period, was found more difficult to be borne on the departure of their friends. With an abiding consciousness of the

[1] This copy is now in the possession of the Editor, having been kindly presented to him by Mr. Gough.

loneliness, or, as Cowper termed it, the duality, of their situation, they were ready to adopt almost any means to enlarge the circle of their friends. An opportunity offered, and was eagerly taken advantage of. At the distance of a mile in an easterly direction from Olney, situate on a rising bank above the Ouse, stands the village of Clifton Reynes. The resident clergyman there was a Mr. Jones, with whom Cowper and Mrs. Unwin had some little acquaintance. One afternoon Cowper observed from a window of his residence that Mrs. Jones, accompanied by a lady of more fashionable appearance than was often seen in the streets of Olney, was shopping about the town. Struck by the aspect of the stranger, and learning that she was Lady Austen, the widow of a baronet, and a sister of Mrs. Jones, Cowper suggested to Mrs. Unwin to invite them to tea. Ever ready to comply with his slightest wishes, she did so. The weather was hot, the proffered hospitality was acceptable, and in due time the ladies arrived. But now came the customary difficulty of a nervous person. No sooner had the invitation been accepted than Cowper repented. It was long before he could summon courage to join the little party he had gathered together. When ultimately persuaded to do so, it was the case of his friends in Southampton-row, and that of Mrs. Unwin, over again. Lady Austen made an instant conquest of him by her liveliness and colloquial talents. The sprightly widow imported something of the brilliancy of intellectual female society into the sombre parlour at Olney. She had lived long

in France, and with the freedom of a person who had seen the world, and accounted it "a great simpleton," she kept up a sparkling conversation without any seeming labour. The dwellers in the Buckinghamshire Patmos were charmed with the radiancy which suddenly surrounded them. New ideas broke in upon them, and Cowper evidenced the power of the fascination to which he had willingly yielded, by escorting the ladies across the meadows on their evening return to Clifton. The fire thus suddenly kindled burnt vehemently. Delighted with the proof of her power, Lady Austen waived all ceremony, solicited further acquaintance by paying a first visit to her enraptured friends, and before their intimacy was more than a fortnight old, had so enlivened and excited them—Cowper now fifty, and Mrs. Unwin seven years older—that with the help of Lady Austen's lackey and Cowper's garden boy, they all —that is, Mr. and Mrs. Jones, Lady Austen, Mrs. Unwin, Cowper, and perhaps two children, for there were seven of them—went picknicking, and dined in the retirement of a spinney, or little patch of wood, at Weston. "A board," according to Cowper's description of the pleasant frolic, "laid over the top of the wheelbarrow served us for a table, our dining room was a root house, lined with moss and ivy. At six o'clock the servants, who had dined under the great elm upon the ground, at a little distance, boiled the kettle, and the said wheelbarrow served us for a tea-table. We then took a walk into the wilderness, about half a mile off, and were at home again a little

after eight, having spent the day together from noon till evening, without one cross occurrence or the least weariness of each other; a happiness few parties of pleasure can boast of." Lady Austen's delight equalled that of her new friends. She was hampered by the lease of a house in London, but determined that at the end of two years, when that incumbrance would be off her hands, she would remove to Olney for the benefit of a retirement near her sister; for the advantage of the ministry of John Scott the commentator, who had succeeded to the curacy of Olney; and last, not least, for the sake of intimacy with Mrs. Unwin and Cowper, an arrangement which the latter assured Newton he was highly pleased with, "upon Mrs. Unwin's account," who, since Mrs. Newton's departure, had been destitute of all female connexion, and had not in any emergency a woman to speak to.

With these feelings and fancies on both sides, Lady Austen remained domiciled at Clifton, but in cordial and happy intimacy with her friends at Olney, for about three months during the summer of 1781. Early in October she returned to her residence in Queen Anne Street, where Cowper arranged for young Unwin to call upon her, describing her beforehand in terms which indicated his own exalted notion of her attractive character. After glancing at her fine taste and discernment, he proceeded thus:—"She has a degree of gratitude in her composition, so quick a sense of obligation, as is hardly to be found in any rank of life, and if report say true, is scarce

indeed in the superior. Discover but a wish to please her, and she never forgets it; not only thanks you, but the tears will start into her eyes at the recollection of the smallest service. With these fine feelings she has the most harmless vivacity you can imagine. In short she is what you will find her to be, upon half an hour's conversation with her." On quitting the country she proposed a correspondence with Cowper, which was agreed to. It was upon her suggestion also that he wrote to her under the assumed relationship of "Sister Anna," the designation by which she stands distinguished in several of his minor poems, whilst she replied to him as to a brother. But the friendship which had grown and strengthened under personal intimacy could not withstand the more delicate interchange of letters. There are persons who cannot address their friends on paper without running into a high-flown style of compliment, if it be not flattery, which, for very shame's sake, cannot be adopted when people stand face to face. This contrast would be especially observable when the previous personal intimacy, as in this case, had been principally that of three people, whilst the letters passed only between two of them. Cowper soon found that his letters did not mount, probably in the expression of personal regard, to the height of Lady Austen's expectations. She conceived not merely dissatisfaction, but even displeasure, at something he had written. He protested afterwards that he could not recollect the particular passage, and assured Unwin, with considerable

simplicity, that he was conscious of "none but the most upright, inoffensive intentions." Still, with the chivalrous politeness which distinguished the beau and the period, he apologised, and the flaw was healed. Correspondence again ran on smoothly for several months, but the little interruption had probably rendered the friends at Olney more critical, and they began to observe, in the words of Cowper, in which alone can the tale be justly told, "that she expressed a sort of romantic idea of our merits, and built such expectations of felicity upon our friendship, as we were sure that nothing human could possibly answer. I wrote to her," continues Cowper, "to remind her that we were mortal, to recommend it to her not to think more highly of us than the subject would warrant, and intimating that when we embellish a creature with colours taken from our own fancy, and so adorned admire and praise it beyond its real merits, we make it an idol, and have nothing to expect in the end but that it will deceive our hopes, and that we shall derive nothing from it but a painful conviction of our error. "Your mother," the statement is derived from a letter to Unwin, "heard me read the letter, she read it herself, and honoured it with her warm approbation. But it gave mortal offence; it received indeed an answer, but such an one as I could by no means reply to; and there ended (for it was impossible that it should ever be renewed) a friendship that bid fair to be lasting, being formed with a woman whose seeming stability of temper, whose knowledge of the world and great expe-

rience of its folly, but above all, whose sense of religion, and seriousness of mind (for with all that gaiety she is a great thinker) induced us both, in spite of that cautious reserve that marks our characters, to trust her, to love and value her, and to open our hearts for her reception." Such a *fracas* was a wonderful disturbance to the even tenour of the ordinary life of Cowper and Mrs. Unwin. It made them seriously unhappy for several days, but resting in the belief of the impossibility of any renewal of the broken friendship, they gradually resumed their old quiet ways, and contented themselves with cautioning Unwin not to repeat his visit in Queen Anne Street. A fortnight had scarcely elapsed before it became evident that Lady Austen did not at all coincide in their view of what was impossible! Working ruffles, to be worn round highly regarded wrists, was, in those days, one of the pretty kindnesses which ladies exhibited towards gentlemen who were in favour. Such things stood much upon a par with slippers among ourselves. Lady Austen had begun a little demonstration of this kind towards Cowper before the affront, and he knew it. In due time Mr. Jones was made the bearer to Olney of three pair of these bewitching reminders, "with advice," remarks Cowper, as if he had been a merchant acknowledging a bale of goods, "that I should soon receive a fourth." The incident happened just at the time when the publication of Cowper's volume of poems was almost momentarily expected. That circumstance gave an opportunity of formal but polite reply, which

was promptly taken advantage of. "I begged Mr. Jones to tell her, when he wrote next, how much I thought myself obliged, and gave him to understand that I should make her a very inadequate though the only return in my power, by laying my volume at her feet. This, likewise, she had previous reason given to expect." Such an advance of course put to flight Cowper's notions of impossibility, and drove him and Mrs. Unwin into a state of doubt as to what was to take place thereafter. "We are far from wishing a renewal of the connexion," he wrote, after he had had time for consideration, "we did indeed find it in a certain way an agreeable one, while that lady continued in the country, yet not altogether compatible with our favourite plan, with that silent retirement in which we have spent so many years, and in which we wish to spend what are yet before us. She is exceedingly sensible, has great quickness of parts, and an uncommon fluency of expression, but her vivacity was sometimes too much for us; occasionally, perhaps, it might refresh and revive us, but it more frequently exhausted us, neither your mother nor I being in that respect at all a match for her. But after all, it does not depend upon us whether our former intimacy shall take place again or not; or rather whether we shall attempt to cultivate it, or give it over, as we are most inclined to do, in despair. I suspect a little . . . that some overtures on her part are to be looked for. Should this happen, however we may wish to be reserved, we must not be rude; but I can answer for us both that

we shall enter into the connexion again with great reluctance, not hoping for any better fruit of it than it has already produced." The end to which all things were now clearly tending was soon attained. Lady Austen returned to Clifton, whence she paved the way to reconciliation by a letter to her friends at Olney. Within a few days afterwards she seized an opportunity to visit them. She threw herself into the arms of Mrs. Unwin, embraced her with "tears of the tenderest affection," and the wound was at once healed. "We were all," remarks Cowper, "a little awkward at first," but they were soon as easy as ever, Lady Austen's previous sway was entirely restored, and Cowper assured Unwin, who had not been quite so much pleased with her ladyship as Cowper was, that when he knew her as well as they did, he would infallibly love her quite as well.

The same hot summer which led to the tea-party at Olney, and the *fête champêtre* in the spinney at Weston, occasioned a little change which subsequent events have made of some celebrity. In the garden then at the back of Cowper's residence, although now severed from it by a different division of the premises, stood, and still stands, a green-house or tool-house, which had served an apothecary, a previous tenant, as a smoking room. By some alterations, Cowper converted this little fabric, scarcely better than a shed, and "not much bigger than a sedan chair," into "a summer parlour," or, as he afterwards learned to call it, his "boudoir." He hung the walls with garden mats, covered the floor with carpets, and managed to

introduce into it a table and two chairs. "We eat, drink, and sleep," he remarks, "where we always did; but here we spend all the rest of our time, and find that the sound of the wind in the trees, and the singing of birds, are much more agreeable to our ears than the incessant barking of dogs and screaming of children; not to mention the exchange of a sweet-smelling garden for the putrid exhalations of Silver End"—a portion of Olney which adjoined Cowper's residence, and which it may be feared has scarcely yet acquired any other reputation than it had in Cowper's days. "Here," he said again, writing four years afterwards to his friend Hill, "I write all that I write in summer time, whether to my friends or the public." A poet's study is a sacred spot, and Cowper's boudoir has become an object of eager inquiry to many a pilgrim.

Early in 1782, Cowper's volume attained its maturity. Many little questions of criticism had arisen during its printing, the last having relation to Newton's preface. The publisher became alarmed at its serious character, and proposed its omission. Cowper allowed that the judgment of the publisher, who by his occupation was bound to understand what would promote the sale of a book, and what would hinder it, deserved peculiar attention, but was personally not at all disinclined to allow the preface to stand. He left the matter to be settled between Johnson and Newton, and the latter has thus related the result:—"As the poems were of a grave cast, Johnson was afraid that my grave preface would make bad worse, and

quite spoil the sale of the book. He printed it, however, and it was bound up with some copies.[1] And if a purchaser looked serious and methodistical he probably was shown one with a preface, but promiscuous customers were not troubled with it."

At length, about the 1st March, 1782, the book was published, and Cowper soon began to inquire with anxiety what was thought of it by his friends and by the reviewers. "Before I had published," he remarks, "I said to myself,—You and I, Mr. Cowper, will not concern ourselves much about what the critics may say of our book. But having once sent my wits out for a venture, I soon became anxious about the issue, and found that I could not be satisfied with a warm place in my own good graces, unless my friends were pleased with me as much as I pleased myself. Meeting with their approbation, I began to feel the workings of ambition. It is well, said I, that my friends are pleased, but friends are sometimes partial, and mine, I have reason to think, are not altogether free from bias: methinks I should like to hear a stranger or two speak well of me. I was presently gratified by the approbation of the *London Magazine* and the *Gentleman's*, particularly by that of the former, and by the plaudit of Dr. Franklin. By the way, magazines are publications we have but little respect for, till we ourselves are chronicled in them, and then they assume an importance in our esteem which before we could not

[1] One of these copies, which formerly belonged to Newton, is now in the Editor's possession.

allow them. But the *Monthly Review*, the most formidable of all my judges, is still behind. What will that critical Rhadamanthus say, when my shivering genius shall appear before him? Still he keeps me in hot water, and I must wait another month for his award!" The *Critical Review* spoke sharply in condemnation, but the dreaded *Monthly* was kind and favourable, and so were others. Thornton forwarded a copy of the volume to Benjamin Franklin, then American ambassador in Paris, whose reply, couched in terms of high commendation, is the plaudit alluded to in the preceding extract. But the silence of Cowper's old friends, Thurlow and Colman, annoyed him more than the praise of others gave him delight. The copy of the volume sent to the Lord Chancellor was accompanied by a most respectful letter, but neither book nor letter produced a word of response. Cowper vented his disappointment in "The Valediction," a poem full of indignant, and with respect to Colman, almost contemptuous anger.

The volume thus published did not attain to anything like general favour. It did not, indeed, contain the elements of popularity. Passages in it are admirable: terse and vigorous lines, striking similes, eloquent declamation, sharp wholesome satire, humorous delineation of character, with many marks and evidences of true poetic power, are to be found throughout; but the execution is too irregular to please persons of fastidious taste, and the subjects treated of are too uniformly grave, and are treated too gravely, to win the attention

of the world at large. Particular lines and passages will stand comparison with anything of a similar character in the works of our greatest poets, but as an appeal to the national heart it cannot be pretended that the volume was successful. So far as it became known its public influence was good, and the praise it received was highly gratifying to the author, but had his fame rested upon that volume alone, his position among English poets would have been strangely different from what it is.

The cessation of his poetical labours, consequent upon the conclusion of his volume, soon became irksome. At first his poetical faculty seemed exhausted by the effort he had made, notwithstanding the ease with which the work had been accomplished. Caraccioli says, as Cowper remarks, that there is something very bewitching in authorship, and that he who has once written will write again. "It may be so," Cowper continues. "I can subscribe to the former part of his assertion from my own experience, having never found an amusement among the many I have been obliged to have recourse to, that so well answered the purpose for which I used it. The quieting and composing effect of it was such, and so totally absorbed have I sometimes been in my rhyming occupation, that neither the past nor the future (those themes which to me are so fruitful in regret at other times) had any longer a share in my contemplation. For this reason I wish, and have often wished since the fit left me, that it would seize me again, but hitherto have wished it in vain. I

see no want of subjects, but I feel a total disability to discuss them." "I should be glad," he adds at a subsequent time, "to begin another volume, but from the will to the power is a step too wide for me to take at present." His friend Bull brought him over from Newport three volumes of the poetry of Madame Guion, which he pronounced "the only French verse he ever read that he found agreeable," and declared it comparable in neatness to Prior. He translated a few of the poems, and determined to proceed in his translations till he had filled a Lilliputian paper-book that he happened to have by him, and then to present the fruit of his labours to Mr. Bull. This occupied a morning occasionally, but it was only original composition that offered the needful stimulant to his mind. Happily this period of fallow occurred at a time of year when he was much engaged in his garden, and when the return of summer weather enabled him and "the dear companion of his walks" to resume their rambles, her arm "fast locked in his." Thus linked together they trudged the country round, but more frequently than any where else to Weston Underwood, a village about two miles westward from Olney, with every nook of which they had been long familiar. Another source of interest existed in the revival of his intimacy with Lady Austen.

Soon after her return to the vicinity of Olney, Mr. Jones had occasion to go to London. Some marauders in the neighbourhood thought the opportunity a favourable one to pay his premises a visit. They entered the garden by night, and

made repeated attempts to find their way into the house, extracting a pane of glass from the kitchen window, and committing several other outrages. The ladies of the family, worn out with continual watching and repeated alarms, took refuge with Cowper and Mrs. Unwin. On the introduction of a proper garrison and Mr. Jones's return home, his wife and Miss Green, her daughter by a former husband, quitted their friends at Olney; but Lady Austen's "spirits having been too much disturbed to be able to repose in a place where she had been so much terrified, she was left behind." The pleasure in the society of Cowper and Mrs. Unwin renewed her old notion of a removal to Olney. Her first plan had been to take the other end of Cowper's residence, occupied at that time "by Dick Coleman, his wife, child, and a thousand rats." On further consideration that notion was abandoned, but her lively imagination in joco-serious mood soon sprung other projects for accomplishing her desire "of consolidating all in one family." They were as happy in her, and she in them, as before the little discord, and having none on earth whom she called friends but them, and they being delighted with her society, it would have been hard indeed if some scheme could not have been devised for the accomplishment of their mutual wishes. In the summer of 1782 she was unexpectedly freed from the incumbrance of her house in London. She determined that Olney should thenceforward be her home, and being unable to procure a suitable separate residence, she hired a portion of the vicarage formerly occupied by Newton. There

was but a small intervening orchard between the back of the vicar's garden and the back of that belonging to Cowper. For facility of communication, in Newton's time, doors had been opened in the garden walls, and a right of way had been hired across the intervening orchard. When Newton removed from Olney, these temporary accommodations were abandoned, but now the doors were re-opened, the old mode of access was resumed, and great was the change which ensued. "From a scene of most uninterrupted retirement, we have passed at once," remarks Cowper, "into a state of constant engagement; not that our society is much multiplied. The addition of an individual has made all this difference. Lady Austen and we pass our days alternately at each other's *château*. In the morning I walk with one or other of the ladies, and in the afternoon wind thread. Thus did Hercules and Samson, and thus do I." Cowper paid his *devoirs* to the new comer daily at eleven, they dined alternately at each other's houses, and the remainder of the day was spent together. He has described one of his winter evenings in a delightful passage in "The Task," which is too well known to bear repeating. He has done the same thing also in one of his letters to Hill. "How different is the complexion of your evenings and mine! Yours spent amid the ceaseless hum that proceeds from the inside of fifty noisy and busy periwigs; mine, by a domestic fireside, in a retreat as silent as retirement can make it, where no noise is made but what we make for our own amusement. For instance,

here are two rustics[1] and your humble servant in company. One of the ladies has been playing on the harpsichord, while I, with the other, have been playing at battledore and shuttlecock. A little dog, in the meantime, howling under the chair of the former, performed in the vocal way to admiration. This entertainment over, I began my letter, and having nothing more important to communicate, have given you an account of it." The effect of this new way of life in stimulating Cowper's intellect soon became apparent. He wrote songs to the music of Lady Austen's harpsichord, and poems on every incident of public or local interest which sufficiently excited him. A poem was indeed the form assumed by all his deepest feelings. Whatever thoroughly aroused him was sure to take that shape. One of his most famous ballads is a proof of this.

One afternoon he was in his saddest mood. Lady Austen exerted herself to dissipate his gloomy fancies. Among other things, she told him the story of John Gilpin, which had been treasured in her memory from childhood. Whence derived, or whether related by her as a true story, or as a myth, does not appear. Its effect on him was that of enchantment. The incidents of the little history took possession of his imagination. On retiring to bed he was kept awake by the re-

[1] So the word was printed in Cowper's "Private Correspondence," i. 233. It has been copied by subsequent writers without remark; but surely the context shows that "ladies" was the word intended. A careless copyist might easily mistake the one word for the other.

collection, and excited by it to convulsive laughter. It followed, almost as of course, that he passed the night in turning the story into a ballad.

In this shape the adventures of the famous horseman told instantly, and wherever they became known. In the household at Olney he and his feats became an inexhaustible source of merriment. "We seldom meet," remarks Cowper, "without refreshing ourselves with the recollection of them." He sent the poem to his friend Unwin, who replied that it made him "laugh tears," and requested permission to publish it. Cowper consented, with the single reservation of his name, and on the 14th November, 1782, it made its appearance in the columns of the *Public Advertiser*. It was slowly but surely making its way to popularity when Henderson, the celebrated actor, began to amuse the public with recitations, delivered at Freemasons' Hall. His attention was directed to "John Gilpin," by Mr. Richard Sharp, better known by the title of "Conversation Sharp." Lines were never written that were better suited for the purposes of a dramatic reader. Recited with moderate skill, they might be relied upon for setting an audience in a roar; and such is the quaint simplicity of the diction, the rapidity with which the incidents are varied, and the skill with which the progress of the narrative is indicated by allusions to a succession of objects of a ludicrous character, that in the hands of a practised actor it must have been perfectly irresistible. Henderson's recitation made it universally popular. It was printed in many places, and in many

ways, in separate editions with and without illustrations, in newspapers, in magazines, and even in common ballad form, and was probably sung about the streets. News of its success penetrated to Olney, and greatly delighted all who were in the secret of the authorship. There is a pleasure in being able to move the popular feeling, which none but those who have accomplished it can know. The comparative failure of the volume of poems was almost compensated by the success of "John Gilpin."

But this celebrated ballad is by no means the only, nor is it the greatest debt, which English literature owes to Lady Austen. She was a reader of Milton, and an admirer—who is not?—of his majestic rhythm. She frequently persuaded Cowper to try his powers in blank verse. After repeated solicitations he promised to comply, if she would furnish him with a subject. She replied: "Oh! you can never be in want of a subject; you can write upon any; write upon this Sofa." The poet obeyed, and "The Task" was the result. The exact period at which he began this new work can only be inferred from a few words in a letter to his friend Bull, dated the 3rd August, 1783: "The Sofa," that is, the first book of the poem, containing 774 lines, "is ended, but not finished, a paradox which your natural acumen, sharpened by habits of logical attention, will enable you to reconcile at a moment. Do not imagine, however, that I lounge over it—on the contrary, I find it severe exercise, to mould and

fashion it to my mind." Benefited by their long fallow, Cowper's mental faculties were active and full of productive power, but his new work proceeded slowly. The blank verse, a metre to which he was unaccustomed, troubled him, and his domestic arrangements, consequent upon the neighbourhood of Lady Austen, interfered so much with his little leisure as to be unfavourable to composition. His day was at that time almost entirely occupied by the duties of his cavalier-like attendance. Mrs. Unwin and he had seldom finished breakfast until ten o'clock. At eleven, according to a custom which he had fallen into on Lady Austen's first settlement at Olney, he passed across his garden, the intervening orchard, and the garden of the vicarage, to pay his morning respects to her ladyship. This duty rendered, he walked, accompanied by one of the ladies, or more frequently by both. Returning from his walk, he dressed for dinner, which came off at two, and the party did not separate till between ten and eleven at night. The vacant hour between ten and eleven in the morning was the only time the poet could find in the whole four and twenty for writing, and occasionally it would happen that the half of that was all that he could secure for the purpose. A man of any energy would easily have emancipated himself from such flimsy shackles, but Cowper was all politeness and Lady Austen exacting. The green withes bound the Samson. "Long usage," as he remarks, "had made that which at first was optional, a point of good man-

ners, and consequently of necessity, and I was forced to neglect the Task to attend upon the Muse who had inspired the subject."

The necessity was submitted to, but it galled and fretted the poet; Lady Austen, too, fell out of health, which rendered the duty more imperative. Probably at the same time the usual concomitants of ill-health, loss of spirits, and increase of selfishness, diminished both the satisfaction of attendance and its reward. One disagreeable thing no doubt led to another; a breach once made is soon widened, and in May, 1784, before "The Task" was quite finished, Lady Austen removed to Bath, and afterwards to Bristol, for change of air. During her absence, Cowper addressed her a farewell letter, of which all we know is contained in Hayley's recollection of its contents, as derived from the lips of Lady Austen. He says that Cowper explained and lamented the circumstances that "forced him to renounce the society of a friend whose enchanting talents and kindness had proved so agreeably instrumental to the revival of his spirits, and to the exercise of his fancy." Hayley wished to see this letter, which he terms "very tender and resolute," but Lady Austen "ingenuously confessed that in a moment of natural mortification" she committed it to the flames.

So abrupt a termination of a friendship which may almost be termed romantic, has given rise to many comments, and in the absence of a knowledge of the facts, conjecture has naturally taken their place, and conclusions have been drawn

which are probably extremely unjust. Cowper himself wrote thus upon the subject to Unwin:—"You are going to Bristol. A lady, not long since our very near neighbour, is probably there; she was there very lately. If you should chance to fall into her company, remember, if you please, that we found the connexion on some accounts an inconvenient one, that we do not wish to renew it, and conduct yourself accordingly. A character with which we spend all our time should be made on purpose for us; too much or too little of any single ingredient spoils all: in the instance in question, the dissimilitude was too great not to be felt continually, and consequently made our intercourse unpleasant. We have reason to believe that she has given up all thoughts of a return to Olney." Again, writing to Lady Hesketh nearly two years afterwards, he remarked:—"All intercourse has ceased between us and Lady Austen almost these two years. This mystery shall also be accounted for when you come. . . You are candid, and will give me credit when I say that the fault is not with us." This is all that has come down to us from the hand of Cowper upon the subject.

If the burnt letter to Lady Austen had been before us, Hayley tells us that we should have found in it "a proof that, animated by the warmest admiration of the great poet, whose fancy she could so successfully call forth, she was willing to devote her life and fortune to his service and protection." He adds that "the sentiment is to be regarded as honourable to the lady," and that she showed him some "elegant and tender verses,"

addressed to her by the poet, verses "such as he might have addressed to a real sister," and, in Hayley's opinion, verses merely expressive of that peculiarity in Cowper's character, "a gay and tender gallantry, perfectly distinct from amorous attachment," but yet verses from which a lady, only called by the name of sister, might be easily pardoned "if she was induced by them to hope that they might possibly be a prelude to a still dearer alliance."

Hayley further tells us that "no person can justly blame Mrs. Unwin for feeling apprehensive that Cowper's intimacy with a lady of such extraordinary talents, might lead him into perplexities of which he was by no means aware." Finally, the same writer informs us that "honourable" as he deemed Lady Austen's "sentiment" of attachment to Cowper to be, "it is still more honourable to the poet that with such feelings as rendered him perfectly sensible of all Lady Austen's fascinating powers, he could return her tenderness with innocent gallantry, and yet resolutely preclude himself from her society when he could no longer enjoy it without appearing deficient in gratitude towards the compassionate and generous guardian of his sequestered life."

The meaning which is half-concealed and half-revealed in Hayley's frothy words, clearly is that if he, who received his information upon the subject during several "very interesting conferences" with Lady Austen, did not totally misunderstand her explanations, she aimed at marriage with Cowper, and put an amorous construction upon

his attentions; that Mrs. Unwin was not willing to be supplanted; and that when Cowper saw the situation in which he was placed between the two ladies, he did not hesitate to write the "very tender yet resolute letter" before alluded to. This then is "the mystery" alluded to by Cowper in his letter to Lady Hesketh. If we read it aright, we cannot at all concur in Hayley's opinion of the conduct of Lady Austen, although it must be admitted, in her excuse, that the difficulty was one of the many which resulted from the false position towards each other in which Cowper and Mrs. Unwin lived. In that there was also a "mystery," which no one has been able to unravel. Lady Hesketh, before visiting them at Olney, made some inquiries upon the subject, and received from Cowper the following answer:—"Your question, your natural, well-warranted, and most reasonable question, concerning me and Mrs. Unwin, shall be answered at large when we meet. But to Mrs. Unwin I refer you for that answer; she is most desirous to give you a most explicit one. I have a history, my dear, belonging to me which I am not the proper person to relate. You have heard somewhat of it, as much as possible for me to write, but that somewhat bears a most inconsiderable proportion to the whole."

Relieved from attendance upon Lady Austen, Cowper proceeded steadily with the revision and transcription of "The Task." The work was completed in October, 1784. Much of it was originally written, and still more of it revised and transcribed, in the summer-house which has been

before mentioned—one of the most interesting little buildings in England.[1] In the course of revision, there is reason to believe that Cowper introduced the beautiful compliment to Mrs. Unwin which occurs in the first book of "The Task:"—

> And witness, dear companion of my walks—
> Whose arm this twentieth winter I perceive
> Fast locked in mine, with pleasure such as Love,
> Confirmed by long experience of thy worth
> And well tried virtues, could alone inspire—
> Witness a joy that thou hast doubled long."

Lady Austen's "sentiment" towards Cowper, which Hayley esteemed so "honourable" to her, would indeed have been peculiarly extraordinary, if it could be supposed that these lines stood in the first draught of this part of "The Task," which was probably read aloud by the poet in the hearing of both his lady friends. The passage seems rather to have been added as a peace-offering to Mrs. Unwin, when the little *fracas* was over.

On the 10th October the complete transcript was sent to Unwin, with instructions to offer it to Johnson for publication; and if "he should stroke his chin, and look up to the ceiling and cry, 'Humph!'" to take it off at once to Longman, Nichols, or some other publisher. Johnson gave no opportunity for tendering it to anybody else. He accepted it at once.

In his arrangements for the publication of "The Task," Cowper, it will be perceived, fell into very

[1] It is a pleasure to be able to state that this choice relic is now in the possession of a gentleman (Mr. Morris of Olney) who is fully alive to its interest and value.

nearly the same mistake as on the occasion of his previous volume. He then half-affronted Unwin by concealing the fact of its composition from him and entrusting the manuscript, on good grounds, to Newton; he now nearly affronted Newton by studiously concealing from him his two years' labour, and entrusting the manuscript to Unwin. There was something in this which either betrayed infirmity of temper, or partook of Cowper's diseased judgment in more serious matters. Probably the former of these suggestions offers the true explanation. Newton had published without communicating his "authorly secrets" to Cowper. Cowper did not complain, but he took this opportunity of being even with him, book for book. Such a feeling presupposes some little decay of friendship towards Newton, but, on the other hand, the course adopted gave Cowper an opportunity of establishing in the mind of Unwin the conviction of his pre-eminence in Cowper's esteem. On the 30th October, 1784, Cowper apprised Newton of the fact that he was "again at Johnson's," with a kind of apology for not mentioning it sooner, "because almost to the last he was doubtful whether he should ever bring it to a conclusion, working often in such distress of mind as, while it spurred him to the work, at the same time threatened to disqualify him for it." Newton answered in "a most friendly letter indeed, but one," remarks Cowper, "in every line of which I could hear the soft murmur of something like mortification that could not be entirely suppressed." He begged to know something of the plan of the

new poem, asked to see a specimen of the new rhythm, and to have a proof sent to him. Cowper forwarded a copy of the arguments of each book, and a passage out of the sixth book descriptive of the restoration of all things, "as most suited to his taste," but declined to let him see the proofs. Newton, piqued, criticised the blank verse of the specimen, and the title of "The Task," and both unfavourably. Cowper deemed his letter "fretful and peevish," and answered in one which "if not," he says, "chargeable with exactly the same qualities, was, however, dry and unsavoury enough. We shall come together again soon, I suppose," he continues, writing to Unwin, "upon as amicable terms as usual, but at present he is in a state of mortification. . . . My design was to pay you a whole compliment, and I have done it. If he says more on the subject, I shall speak freely, and perhaps please him less than I have done already." For a little while Newton allowed this circumstance to influence the frequency and the completely confidential character of his correspondence. Cowper and Mrs. Unwin "studiously deposited" the reasons by which Cowper justified his conduct "with those who were most likely to transmit them" to Newton. Probably Bull was one of the persons alluded to, who had been in Cowper's confidence throughout the whole composition of the poem, and, in the end, before the publication of the work, Cowper was "very much pleased" to receive a letter from Newton in which he found the following sentence,—"I am perfectly satisfied with the propriety of your proceeding as to the

publication." "Now, therefore," Cowper exclaims, with evident delight, "we are friends again!" As in the former case, especially if Cowper's reasons were on this occasion worth a rush, previous openness instead of studied concealment would have prevented a very unnecessary brangle between two persons who, as Cowper freely declared, had an affection for each other at bottom.[1]

Cowper corrected the press of "The Task" entirely

[1] A passage in one of Newton's letters to Bull, written at this time, probably contains an allusion to this circumstance, and if so, exhibits the characteristic way in which his piety regarded it:—"We are disciples—Jesus is our Master. The world we live in is His school, and every person and event is under His management, designed to forward us in the great lessons He would have us learn—such as the denial of self-will, a distrust of creatures, and an absolute dependence upon Himself. In this view, mortifications are mercies, losses gains, hindrances helps, and all things, even those which seem most contrary, are working together for our good. Creatures smile or frown, caress or disappoint us; friends grow cool, and enemies become kind, just as His wisdom sees most expedient to promote our progress. Where we look for most, it often comes to little; when we look for nothing, we often obtain most. Our wisest plans and best endeavours at one time produce great troubles; at another time, what we do at random, and what we account the most trifling incidents, are productive of happy, lasting, and extensive consequences. It is well for us if, by a long train of such changing, cross experiences, we at length attain to some proficiency, and can say with David, 'My soul, wait thou *only* upon God, for my expectation is from him.' The heart-possession of two maxims of Mr. Henry is well worth all that the acquisition can cost us. The one is, 'That every creature is that to us which God makes it,' and the other to much the same purpose, 'That we cannot expect too little from man, nor too much from God.' In this school I am placed, these lessons I am aiming to learn; but I am a poor scholar, and indeed any master, but He who condescends to be my Teacher, would turn me off as an incorrigible dunce."

himself, the principal question which occurred during the printing of the volume relating to the insertion of "John Gilpin." At first Johnson would insert it "by all means." On reconsideration he who had been scared by Newton's preface as too serious, was afraid of the adventures of the celebrated horseman as too light. Other thoughts, or better advice, rectified his mistake, and "John Gilpin" was ultimately not only inserted in the volume but announced on the title-page. The world turned with eagerness, and no little surprise, to the new work of an author who had been rendered popular without having been known by name, and in this way "John Gilpin" aided "The Task" by drawing immediate attention to it. Not that its success was thus permanently influenced. "The Task" has qualities which could not fail to achieve popularity, but that which unaided might have been an affair of months, was rendered immediate by the general currency of its humorous predecessor. Its success was instant and decided. The commendation of the public outran the eulogy of the critics; the leading passages soon became household words, and the poet of Olney an object of general curiosity and the most popular author of his day. In the meantime he had found new friends and had plunged into new labours.

The brief but glowing friendship with Lady Austen, although it had failed in the end, had for a time alleviated the dulness of Cowper's seclusion, and had entirely got rid of his unwillingness to admit new acquaintances. At Weston stood an old seat of the Throckmortons, an ancient Roman

Catholic family, of some distinction both in history and in society. A small park and pleasure-grounds surrounded the mansion. The former stood open to the neighbourhood, and the latter were rendered accessible by keys which were liberally entrusted to all persons who were deemed likely to use such a privilege with propriety. Just after Lady Austen had left Olney, and whilst Cowper was busy in the completion of "The Task," some family changes occurred among the Throckmortons which occasioned the mansion at Weston to pass into new hands. Weston, as every reader of "The Task" perfectly well knows, furnished Cowper and Mrs. Unwin with almost their only walk. "Of that," he says, "we are never weary; its superior beauties gained it our preference at the first, and for many years it has prevailed to win us away from all the others." In Weston were the scenes which—

> "daily viewed,
> Pleased daily, and whose novelty survived
> Long knowledge and the scrutiny of years."

The new occupants of Weston House were Mr. John Courtenay Throckmorton, the heir of the baronetcy, and his wife Mary Catherine, a daughter of one of the Giffards of Chillington in Staffordshire, another old Roman Catholic family. Mr. Throckmorton, who was at that time about thirty years of age, had just married. Cowper addressed a formal request to him for permission to continue to use a key of his pleasure-grounds, originally received from his mother. The favour solicited was, of course, instantly granted. Some

time afterwards, Mr. Throckmorton being about to amuse his neighbours by sending up a balloon, then a recent invention, invited Cowper to be present. He went, accompanied by Mrs. Unwin, and both were extremely flattered by their reception. The whole country was assembled, but the Olney couple were distinguished by peculiar notice. A day or two afterwards they were overtaken by a shower of rain in Weston Park. Mrs. Throckmorton espied them standing under a tree, and ran out to invite them to take shelter within the hall. A pleasant chat confirmed their newborn intimacy. When the shower was over she showed them the private garden, "almost their only walk, and certainly their only retreat in which they are not liable to interruption." Cowper's gratification was expressed so emphatically that Mrs. Throckmorton offered him a key of this almost sacred spot. It was shortly afterwards presented by her husband, and was most gratefully received. The situation of the Throckmortons was almost as secluded as that of Cowper, but with this difference, that whilst the latter was regarded with deference and respect by all the inhabitants of Olney, the Throckmortons were exposed to gross affronts on account of their religion. The new acquaintance was, therefore, probably as welcome to them as to Cowper. Throckmorton himself, as Cowper assures us, was one of the most agreeable men he ever saw, whilst in the manners of the lady was combined that mixture of friendliness and good breeding which Cowper could never resist. She charmed him by her good-nature, complaisance,

and innocent cheerfulness. "I should like exceedingly," he exclaimed, "to be on an easy footing there, to give a morning call now and then, and to receive one, but nothing more." More, however, soon came of it.

Whilst this new intimacy was growing, Cowper needed fresh poetical employment. "For some weeks," he remarked, in explanation to Newton, "after I had finished 'The Task,' and sent away the last sheet corrected, I was through necessity idle, and suffered not a little in my spirits for being so. One day being in such distress of mind as was hardly supportable, I took up the 'Iliad;' and merely to divert attention, and with no more preconception of what I was then entering upon, than I have at this moment of what I shall be doing this day twenty years hence, translated the twelve first lines of it. The same necessity pressing me again, I had recourse to the same expedient, and translated more. Every day bringing its occasion for employment with it, every day consequently added something to the work; till at last I began to reflect thus:—The 'Iliad' and the 'Odyssey' together consist of about forty thousand verses. To translate these forty thousand verses will furnish me with occupation for a considerable time. I have already made some progress, and I find it a most agreeable amusement. Homer, in point of purity, is a most blameless writer; and, though he was not an enlightened man, has interspersed many great and valuable truths throughout both his poems. In short, he is in all respects a most venerable old gentleman, by an acquaintance with

whom no man can disgrace himself. The literati are all agreed to a man, that although Pope has given us two pretty poems under Homer's titles, there is not to be found in them the least portion of Homer's spirit, nor the least resemblance of his manner. I will try, therefore, whether I cannot copy him somewhat more happily myself. I have at least the advantage of Pope's faults and failures, which like so many buoys upon a dangerous coast will serve me to steer by, and will make my chance for success more probable. These, and many other considerations, but especially a mind that abhorred a *vacuum* as its chief bane, impelled me so effectually to the work, that ere long I mean to publish proposals for a subscription to it, having advanced so far as to be warranted in doing so. I have connections, and no few such, by means of which I have the utmost reason to expect that a brisk circulation may be procured; and, if it should prove a profitable enterprise, the profit will not accrue to a man who may be said not to want it." Behold him, then, immersed in a fresh sea of labour, resolutely toiling day by day to accomplish forty lines, his daily quota of the forty thousand verses, and looking around him right and left among the "connections" alluded to in the preceding letter, for any one who might bring help to his subscription list. In reference to these connections, his position was greatly altered by the publication of "John Gilpin" and "The Task."

The celebrity which followed the issue of the latter of these poems totally changed his relation-

ship to the world on the outside of Olney, and especially to that part of it which consisted of his former acquaintances, and the kindred among whom he had been brought up. Before that event every one of them had stood aloof from him. His Cowper relations paid, indeed, some allowance towards his maintenance into the hands of Hill. They recognised his claims, that is to say, as a poor relation, and probably never did or said anything to him, or about him, that was positively unkind, but they treated him as if his state of mind placed him beyond the pale of rational association, or as if they were too much occupied to have time or thought to give to one who did not solicit their attention. When he became famous they suddenly discovered that he had sufficient intellect to be re-admitted into their society. We have seen how Thurlow and Colman treated the gift of his first volume of "Poems." If he sent a copy of it to any of his relations, it was received by them with a similar disregard. But "The Task" made all the world feel an interest in the poet and in everything belonging to him. His residence, his way of life, and his character, became objects of public inquiry and curiosity, and he soon received evidence that the old regard of his school-fellows and relatives had revived. The first person who sought him out was the Rev. Walter Bagot, a brother of Lord Bagot, who had been "much intimate" with Cowper at Westminster, and had kept up an acquaintance with him whilst he was resident in the Temple. Bagot had a brother, a man of large estate, who lived at

Chichely, about four miles from Olney. Visiting this brother, in the autumn of 1785, he came over to renew his acquaintance with Cowper. On a second visit, Cowper communicated to him that he was engaged upon Homer, and intended publication by subscription. He entered warmly into the poet's cause, and procured him many acceptable additions to his subscription list.

The next among these revivals of old friendships was, to Cowper, the most gratifying and the most important of the whole. On the 12th October, 1785, on coming down to breakfast, he found upon the table, to his great surprise, a letter franked by his uncle Ashley. It contained a few lines from his cousin Harriet—lines of kindly inquiry and solicitude—but evidently written in total ignorance of his position and circumstances. It was just twenty years, almost to a day, since the last communication had passed between them. Scared by the religious tone which pervaded his correspondence just after his arrival at Huntingdon, and which she probably conceived to be evidence of his continued madness, she had ceased to write to him. In 1778 she lost her husband, Sir Thomas Hesketh, who left her a handsome property, and bequeathed to Cowper a legacy of one hundred pounds. The latter circumstance might have afforded a plea for renewed correspondence, but Cowper was then only just recovering from his second attack of lunacy, the business was transacted by Hill, and the widow was fully occupied in her own affairs. Whether she had actually seen "The Task" when she re-opened

the correspondence, does not very clearly appear. Probably she had, but it was "John Gilpin," with its humour "fast and furious," that revived her recollection of what Cowper used to be, and encouraged her to write to him. He received her advances with a delight that was perfectly boyish —"with a heart as light as a bird,"—to use one of his own favourite similes. He poured forth in his answers to her a stream of confidences, which carried her, and has now carried all the world, into the very innermost recesses of his feelings, his home, and his occupations. Never since English was written, did it run off the pen more glibly than in these charming compositions, which sparkle like diamonds with sudden flashes of wit and humour. He never could love much, he tells us, without loving too much, and truly these letters prove the intensity of his affection. In the communicativeness of his renovated fondness, he laid open, as nearly as any human being could do so, every corner and cranny of his heart, and by the very force of the strong attachment which breathed in every line, carried her feelings almost as entirely captive as she had carried his. She inquired into his money circumstances, his health, his way of life. He revealed everything; he willingly accepted her offers of pecuniary help; he consented, at her solicitation, to consult Dr. Kerr, of Northampton, on his health, although Mrs. Unwin had baited him to do so "this many a-day, even as a bear is baited," but in vain; he pressed her into his service to solicit subscriptions for his Homer, and was absolutely overwhelmed

with joy when she proposed to visit Olney. Mrs. Unwin and he would have made arrangements for her reception in their own house, but this would have involved changes to which Lady Hesketh would not consent. Schemes were devised for accommodating her in other houses, but in vain. She herself was so enchanted with her new-found cousin, so entirely carried away by his glowing letters, that she proposed, even before she had been near the place, to pass constantly a part of the summer there. The hint made Cowper wild with delight. It led also to an enlargement of their views, which got them out of the difficulty with respect to a residence. Scott, the curate of Olney, had now removed to London, to the Lock Chapel. His successor in the Vicarage was an unmarried man, who occupied merely two rooms. The rest of the house, including the apartments once tenanted by Lady Austen, was unfurnished. A tradesman at Olney undertook to furnish it "from a bed to a platter," and thus, at an expense of fifteen guineas, Lady Hesketh secured a residence at Olney from June to November. And now every body at Olney, but more than all the poet, stood on tiptoe, looking out for June. Cowper lived in an agony of expectation, pouring out his ardent anticipations of happiness in letters which rushed on in their simple cheerful beauty with the freedom and joyfulness of a mountain stream.

In the meantime his acquaintance was renewed and enlarged on every side. His old friend and intended patron, Major Cowper, now become a

general, procured from him a specimen of his Homer, and criticised it sharply, but kindly; George Colman, to whom Cowper wrote, upon a hint from Hill that he had inquired after him, and had said something about an intention to write to him, encouraged the translation in "the most affectionate letter imaginable." Lord Dartmouth and Mr. Smith (afterwards Lord Carrington) gave him their support. Lord Thurlow began to inquire about him; Fuseli brought his fastidious and accurate knowledge to bear upon a portion of the translation which Johnson submitted to him; whilst Maty at first encouraged the idea, and afterwards condemned its execution with asperity. The various judgments of these and other critics, Lady Hesketh being of the number, almost worried Cowper out of his life; at any event, they involved him in "a storm of trouble," which drove him to the very verge of a resolution to drop his undertaking for ever. Calmer thoughts ultimately prevailed. He sifted the chaff from the wheat, availed himself of what he deemed just in the animadversions of his judges, and proceeded with perseverance, and in good heart and hope with his daily toil, cheered and comforted by his intimacy with the Throckmortons, which grew apace, and by some little acquaintance with one or two other families of the neighbouring gentry. The renewal of his intimacy with his own family brought him fresh communications from his friend Anonymous. In January, 1786, he received an unsigned letter by post, warning him against allowing his health to suffer in case the success of his Homer should not come up

to his expectations, regretting the narrowness of his circumstances, announcing an intention to allow him an annuity of fifty pounds per annum, and to send immediately a small parcel by the Wellingborough coach. The parcel contained a snuff-box of tortoiseshell, having a landscape of a cottage with trees, on the lid, with three hares sporting in the foreground; "The Peasants' Nest," as an inscription above, and "Tiny, Puss, and Bess" below, names derived from an account of his hares, communicated by him to the *Gentleman's Magazine* in May, 1784. That Lady Hesketh knew perfectly well from whose kindly hand these gifts proceeded, is unquestionable; it would seem also that she negatived Cowper's idea that his uncle Ashley was the donor. Cowper fancied that he traced some peculiarities of his uncle's handwriting in the anonymous letters; he imagined also that he found in them a resemblance to that of Lady Hesketh—in all probability he was right. The resemblance and the peculiarities strengthen the probabilities in favour of the uncle and the cousin having had a family connection with the donor, and lead directly up to Theodora.

The June which was wished for as June was never wished for before "since it was made," at length arrived, and in the middle of it Lady Hesketh made her entry into Olney amidst the ringing of bells and a variety of other honours, never paid there to any potentate save Lord Dartmouth. Cowper's fussy preparations are detailed in his letters with most amusing minuteness. The ar-

rangements for the previous reception of that high functionary cookee, for the care of her ladyship's horses, for the comfort of her journey, for the guidance of her coachman between Newport and Olney, were all superintended by Cowper himself, who even went to the Olney upholsterer's to see the furniture of her intended bed, and pronounced it "superb, of printed cotton, and the subject classical. Every morning you will open your eyes on Phaëton kneeling to Apollo, and imploring his father to grant him the conduct of his chariot for a day. May your sleep be as sound as your bed will be sumptuous!" He would have met her at Newport, but she prudently advised the contrary. He consequently sent an honest fellow who worked in his garden, whose name was Kitchener, but whom they called Kitch for brevity. Dressed in a smart blue coat, which, after Cowper had worn it some years, had been transferred to the garden-helper, who had now worn it some years himself, and duly mounted on horseback, this worthy was stationed at Newport to be her *avant-courier*. "The first man, therefore, you shall see," were Cowper's directions to his dear comfortable cousin, "in a blue coat with white buttons, in the famous town of Newport, cry 'Kitch!' He will immediately answer, 'My lady!' and from that moment you are sure not to be lost."

The excitement consequent upon these high doings was too much for him. When Lady Hesketh arrived his spirits broke down under the pressure of too much joy. In vain was he mortified and she alarmed: she found him silent and

melancholy, and probably to Mrs. Unwin was left even the business of escorting Lady Hesketh to the Vicarage across the two gardens and the intervening orchard, the gates into which were now for the third time thrown open. But this attack was, fortunately, but transitory. In a few days the sable hue wore off, he became more than usually himself again, and made amends for his temporary failure by unwonted cheerfulness. The meeting was certainly one of deep interest on both sides. To him it was not merely "the sight of the kindest relation that ever man was blest" with, it was the completion of his renewed intimacy with his "family," a connexion severed for twenty years, but which he had never ceased to regard with pride as well as with affection. It established him in the estimation of his neighbours as a gentleman, and secured him consideration from persons by whom his claims to friendly attention had been previously overlooked, or to whom they had been unknown. On Lady Hesketh's part it solved all the mysteries of his position, and enabled her to report to the still anxious Theodora what were his actual relations towards Mrs. Unwin, what sort of person Mrs. Unwin really was, and all the most intimate particulars of the mode of life which they pursued, topics in reference to which some degree of curiosity in Theodora may well be excused. The letters in which these particulars were given to her by Lady Hesketh, were preserved by Theodora with his early poems, and came with them into the possession of Mr. James Croft. He strung together

some extracts, principally relating to Mrs. Unwin, and appended them to his publication of the early poems with the title of "Anecdotes of the Poet." Mr. Croft's acquaintance with the character of the poet and his previous life, were not so familiar as to induce any one to feel satisfied with his selection from papers of such singular interest, but so far as his extracts go they are most valuable, and speak volumes in favour of Mrs. Unwin. If the originals of the letters extracted from have not really been destroyed, we may still hope that they will be published. Mrs. Unwin is represented in them as "very far from grave; on the contrary, she is cheerful and gay, and laughs *de bon cœur* upon the smallest provocation. Amidst all the little puritanical words which fall from her *de temps en temps*, she seems to have by nature a great fund of gaiety—great, indeed, must it have been, not to have been totally overcome by the close confinement in which she has lived, and the anxiety she must have undergone for one whom she certainly loves as well as one human being can love another. I will not say she idolizes him, because that she would think wrong, but she certainly seems to possess the truest regard and affection for this excellent creature, and, as I before said, has in the most literal sense of those words, no will, or shadow of inclination, but what is his." The following comes in at the end of a description of how a wet evening was passed by the three in Lady Hesketh's rooms at the Vicarage. "Our friend delights in a large table and a large chair; there are two of the latter

comforts in my parlour. I am sorry to say that he and I always spread ourselves out in them, leaving poor Mrs. Unwin to find all the comfort she can in a small one, half as high again as ours, and considerably harder than marble. However, she protests it is what she likes, that she prefers a high chair to a low one, and a hard one to a soft one, and I hope she is sincere, indeed, I am persuaded she is. Her constant employment is knitting stockings, which she does with the finest needles I ever saw, and very nice they are—the stockings, I mean. Our cousin has not for many years worn any other than those of her manufacture. She knits silk, cotton, and worsted. She sits knitting on one side of the table in her spectacles, and he on the other reading to her (when he is not employed in writing) in his. In winter his morning studies are always carried on in a room by himself; but as his evenings are spent in the winter in transcribing, he usually, I find, does this *vis-à-vis* Mrs. Unwin. At this time of the year, he writes always in the morning in what he calls his boudoir; this is in the garden; it has a door and a window; just holds a small table with a desk and two chairs; but though there are two chairs, and two persons might be contained therein, it would be with a degree of difficulty; for this cause—as I make a point of not disturbing a poet in his retreat—I go not there."

A few weeks before Lady Hesketh's arrival, and shortly after the business of lodging-hunting had been concluded, the Throckmortons drew the atten-

tion of Cowper and Mrs. Unwin to a house in the village of Weston Underwood, which was then lying untenanted, expressing a wish that they would take it and become their neighbours. Cowper mentioned the circumstance several times to Lady Hesketh, and one of her earliest businesses at Olney was to ride over to Weston, and view the Lodge, which was the name of the empty residence. The house which Cowper occupied at Olney had fallen out of repair, its situation was unhealthy, and there was no one near them whom they could look upon as an agreeable neighbour. The Throckmortons, who were the owners of Weston Lodge, were willing to do whatever was desired in the way of repairs; as a place of residence, Weston was very much to be preferred to Olney; and the family of the landlord were every thing that could be wished as neighbours. But there were difficulties of a financial kind. Neither Mrs. Unwin nor Cowper possessed any ready money, the expenses of removal and of new furniture applicable to a larger house would be considerable. All these expenses Lady Hesketh took upon herself, fitting up two rooms specially for her own accommodation on future visits, and providing all furniture that was needed for the other parts of the house. Such friendly liberality cleared away all difficulties. Lady Hesketh and the Olney couple dined with the Throckmortons on the 3rd July, 1786, to settle the terms, and on the following 15th November the removal from Olney, which Cowper described to Hill as involving a change "as great as (to compare metropolitan things with

rural) from St. Giles's to Grosvenor-square," was happily effected.

Lady Hesketh's visit to Olney extended from June till the 14th November, and was in every way a happy one. Olney benefited by her generosity, and the poet took advantage of her as a transcriber. If the transcript of the translation of Homer sent to the printer be in existence, several books of it will be found to be in her handwriting. Her willingness to assist him in other respects shines out in many passages of Cowper's subsequent correspondence; indeed, every body was charmed with her manner, which was universally kind, and with her continuous flow of good spirits. It is not "a sudden flash of benevolence," remarks Cowper, "occasioned merely by change of scene, but it is her natural turn, and has governed all her conduct ever since I knew her first." Whilst at Olney, she fell, as nearly as possible, into the customs of the family in which she might be said to have been visiting, and, like Mrs. Unwin, made all her little engagements and occupations bend to Cowper's anxiety to make progress in his translation. The deviations which she occasioned in their ordinary way of life were therefore singularly few. The chief of them were, that Cowper allowed some of his correspondence to fall a little into arrear; that they received a morning visit now and then from the Throckmortons, or the Wrights of Gayhurst, and that on most afternoons the whole party (Lady Hesketh, Mrs. Unwin, and Cowper) instead of a walk, took an airing in Lady Hesketh's carriage,

along the roads in the neighbourhood as far as Beaujeat turnpike and back again, or to the cabinet-maker's at Newport, or to Weston to look after the repairs of the new house, or to the Throckmortons, or the Wrights, to return a call. To the majority of mankind, such things will seem extremely harmless, but there were people at Olney who were of a very different opinion. With the quickness of sight which we often display when investigating the conduct and motives of our neighbours, the increasing intimacy with a Roman Catholic family, in which there was a resident priest, and especially the taking a residence which stood almost in direct contact with Weston Hall—so near to it, that Cowper enumerated to Lady Hesketh as one of its advantages, that she might step immediately into Mr. Throckmorton's pleasure-ground, where she would not soil her slippers even in winter—were accepted as palpable evidence of an intention to go over to Rome, and even those who had some doubts on that point concurred in condemning the carriage-rides as acts of backsliding in Cowper and Mrs. Unwin, a conformity with the customs of the world deeply to be deplored, as tending to interpose a barrier to Cowper's restoration to Christian privileges. We are told that the simple people of Olney stood astonished at these deviations into forbidden paths, and that in very grief of heart some of them represented the case to their old pastor, John Newton. His conduct upon the occasion is deeply to be lamented. We have already alluded to the easiness with which he was misled in the administra-

tion of charitable relief, whenever the applicant addressed him in the simulated language of piety. A similar infirmity of judgment exhibited itself on the present occasion. The Olney exaggeration, or rather the ignorant and vulgar misrepresentation, assumed the form of religious anxiety. In this shape it was a mere trap for Newton, who fell into it at once. He had previously taken alarm at Cowper's renewal of his family connexions, and had warned him of the dangerous influence of worldly intimacies upon Christian character. Cowper replied that he had been providentially led in the new way which had been opened before him, and in the wild strain which his peculiar phase of madness dictated, remarked that if God's purposes in thus directing him were gracious, He would take care to prove them such in the issue, and in the meantime would preserve Cowper from all mistakes in conduct that might prove pernicious to himself, or give reasonable offence to others. "I can say it as truly as it was ever spoken," he concluded, "Here I am; let him do with me as seemeth him good." This was written before the arrival of Lady Hesketh. On receipt of the further tidings from Olney, which chimed in, it will be perceived, with Newton's own anticipations, apparently without answering Cowper, he addressed a strong letter of mingled warning and remonstrance to Mrs. Unwin. The letter is not known to be in existence, but we have two reports of its contents from Cowper, one in a letter to Unwin, and the other in a reply to Newton himself. If the inferences which may be drawn from

these sources be not altogether deceptive, Newton's letter will find few defenders. Anxiety to maintain his faithfulness as a minister, or as a Christian friend, was probably the particular feeling under the influence of which he wrote. But that anxiety is a mere form of self-deception, when it urges to judgment without inquiry. True ministerial faithfulness is, of all kinds of interference with Christian liberty, the one which acts with the greatest forethought, and calmness, and candour. It may be known by its tone, which is more that of sorrow than of anger; by its gentleness of operation, which does not break the bruised reed; and in such a case as that of Cowper—a man borne down by morbid suffering, which he delusively esteemed to be penal—it would be distinguished by a liberality and latitude of allowance which would shrink from forming a judgment out of a fear of doing injustice to a being whose condition was so unlike that of other men, that it could be only partially understood. Interference which lacks these properties may be properly suspected to be allied to some quality less commendable than Christian faithfulness.[1]

[1] Newton worthily occupied a prominent position among Christian ministers in England at a very interesting period of our Church history, but his great merits must not blind us to his human infirmities. A curious example of one of these occurs in relation to the Unwins. Newton wished to procure a presentation to the Blue Coat School for a relation of his. He was unwilling to apply to his constant friend and benefactor, Mr. Thornton, feeling the weight of the numerous obligations which he had conferred upon him through many years, and knowing how many applications Mr. Thornton was continually subject to. Mrs. Unwin spoke to her son,

Cowper answered Newton's letter with praiseworthy calmness, and fulness of explanation. His language was of course terse and vigorous, but there was no bitterness, no recrimination. Whilst he denied its justice, he accepted the reproof as an evidence of friendship, and did not allow it to interfere with the frequency or the cordiality of his correspondence.

Lady Hesketh had scarcely left Weston, and the poet and Mrs. Unwin were hardly beginning

and after some time and trouble he was able to procure what was wanted. Waiting upon Newton in his vestry one Sunday after service, Unwin put the presentation in his hand. Newton really and truly valued the gift highly, and felt deeply grateful to Unwin for having procured it for him, but he received it almost in silence. Unwin was surprised. The gift was of the highest importance, he had taken great pains to procure it, Newton accepted it with what seemed an ill-mannered taciturnity, which so much offended Unwin that he could scarcely forbear upbraiding him on the spot. He left the vestry almost in anger, and half repentant at having bestowed pains for such an ungrateful person. He communicated what had occurred, and fully explained his feelings by letter to his mother and Cowper. So did Newton. The different characters of their letters may be judged from the following note by Mrs. Unwin, which explains the riddle, and is now published for the first time; it adds one to the few scraps of Mrs. Unwin's writing that have been given to the press.

MRS. UNWIN TO HER SON THE REV. W. C. UNWIN.

May 10, 1781.

MY DEAR BILLY,—Accept my most sincere thanks for your favour done me, by that conferred on Mr. Newton's relation. I am sorry Mr. Newton's manner shocked you; but am rejoiced it had no other effect. It was not for want of sensibility of the obligation, I am certain; but I never in my life knew one that seemed so much at a loss as he is for expressing his feelings by word of mouth. Last Sunday's post brought Mr. Cowper a letter from him with the following

to settle down in their new habitation, when they were visited by a terrible calamity. Young Unwin was out with Mr. Thornton, with whom he had become extremely intimate, upon a little journey in the south of England. On their return, at Winchester, Mr. Thornton was seized with typhus fever. He recovered, but had hardly done so, when Unwin fell ill of the same complaint. For some time his recovery was not doubted. He himself was full of hope, and the reports of all about him were cheerful. There came a relapse, which was fatal. His loss was great in many ways. Mrs. Unwin, fast approaching to old age, was bereaved of her only son; Cowper was deprived of his most intimate male friend, a man in the prime of life, highly esteemed, and certain of success in his vocation. Cowper wrote a Latin inscription for his tomb-stone, which was approved by those interested, but he rests in the nave of Winchester Cathedral, under a flat stone, the inscription on which is in English.[1]

passage:—"Yesterday Mr. Unwin came into the vestry and presented me with a nomination to the hospital. He did it very cordially and handsomely, and I thanked him very heartily and honestly. For though I had no right to expect such a favour from him merely on my own account, I am very willing to consider myself personally obliged to him for it. I know Mrs. Unwin will believe I am duly sensible of her kindness, and I call my best thanks to her but a peppercorn, because they fall short of what I mean. I am no loser by this disbursement of thanks to him and to her, for Mr. and Mrs. Nind have paid me in kind."—I am, my dear Billy, your obliged and affectionate mother, M. U.

[1] "In memory of the Reverend Wm. Cawthorne Unwin, A.M., Rector of Stock cum Ramsden—Belhouse, in Essex.

This trouble was shortly followed by another. January was a month that Cowper always dreaded. Throughout it he ordinarily strove, more than at other times, to keep himself occupied and amused. In January, 1787, he by no means omitted his usual precautions, and was assisted in all his endeavours by the Throckmortons, who were found to be "the most obliging neighbours in the world," always friendly and yet never oppressively so. Mr. Throckmorton, who, as Cowper remarked, had long since put him in possession of all his ground, now, by another key, gave him the use of his library; an acquisition of infinite value to a man who, never having been able to live without books since he first knew his letters, yet had no books of his own. Mrs. Throckmorton succeeded Lady Hesketh as a copyist of Homer, and when she left Weston on the recurrence of the London season, "the *padre*," their Roman Catholic chaplain, took her place. But whilst others worked for Cowper, he himself became unable to resume his usual task. A nervous fever first deprived him of sleep, and then threw him into his old condition of maniacal melancholy. For six months he was totally unable to write. During all that time he confined himself to his own chamber, and esteemed the sight of any face but that of Mrs. Unwin, "an

He was educated at the Charter-House in London, under the Rev. Dr. Crucius, and having gone through the education of that school, he was at an early period admitted to Christ's College, Cambridge. He died in this city the 29th November, 1786, aged 41 years; leaving a widow and three young children."

insupportable grievance." His friend Bull forced himself, as Cowper describes it, into his "hiding-place," and "had no great cause to exult in his success." He probably found the poor miserable hypochondriac in the same condition of moping dejection, as his cousin did in the Temple in 1763. After about eight months he recovered, as on previous occasions, suddenly, but not so entirely as to be able to use his pen upon Homer until near the expiration of a year.

One singular change in the state of his mind took place on his recovery on this occasion. He explains it on resuming his epistolary intercourse with Newton. "After a long but necessary interruption of our correspondence, I return to it again, in one respect, at least, better qualified for it than before; I mean by a belief of your identity, which for thirteen years' I did not believe. The acquisition of this light, if light it may be called, which leaves me as much in the dark as ever on the most interesting subjects, releases me, however, from the disagreeable suspicion that I am addressing myself to you as the friend whom I loved and valued so highly in my better days, while, in fact, you are not that friend but a stranger. I can now write to you without seeming to act a part, and without having any need to charge myself with dissimulation; a charge from which in that state of mind, and

[1] That is, from 1774, probably from about the time when he quitted Newton's house on his partial recovery from his second attack of lunacy, to the present time, in 1787.

under such an uncomfortable persuasion, I knew not how to exculpate myself, and which, as you will easily conceive, not seldom made my correspondence with you a burthen. Still indeed it wants, and is likely to want, that best ingredient which can alone make it truly pleasant either to myself or you—that spirituality which once enlivened all our intercourse. You will tell me, no doubt, that the knowledge I have gained is an earnest of more and more valuable information, and that the dispersion of the clouds in part promises, in due time, their complete dispersion. I should be happy to believe it; but the power to do so is at present far from me. Never was the mind of man benighted to the degree that mine has been. The storms that have assailed me would have overset the faith of every man that ever had any; and the very remembrance of them, even after they have been long passed by, makes hope impossible." The disclosure of such a singular delusion, which he never hinted at before, ought to make us careful in our conclusions respecting any oddities in Cowper's conduct towards Newton during the period of its prevalence. When he next saw Newton, which was on a visit paid by him and his wife to Weston, in the summer of 1788, Cowper says he "found those comforts in his visit, which had before sweetened all their interviews, in part restored." "I knew you," he continues, "knew you for the same shepherd who was sent to lead me out of the wilderness into the pasture where the Chief Shepherd feeds His flock, and felt my sentiments of friendship for you the

same as ever. But one thing was still wanting, and that thing the crown of all. I shall find it in God's time, if it be not lost for ever. When I say this, I say it trembling; for at what time soever comfort shall come, it will not come without its attendant evil; and whatever good thing may recur in the interval, I have sad forebodings of the event, having learnt by experience that I was born to be persecuted with peculiar fury, and assuredly believing that such as my lot has been it will be to the end. This belief is connected in my mind with an observation I have often made, and is, perhaps, founded in great part upon it: that there is a certain *style* of dispensation maintained by Providence in the dealings of God with every man, which, however the incidents of his life may vary, and though he may be thrown into many different situations, is never exchanged for another. The style of dispensation peculiar to myself has hitherto been that of sudden, violent, unlooked-for change. When I have thought myself falling into the abyss, I have been caught up again; when I have thought myself on the threshhold of a happy eternity, I have been thrust down to hell. The rough and the smooth of such a lot, taken together, should perhaps have taught me never to despair, but through an unhappy propensity in my nature to forebode the worst, they have, on the contrary, operated as an admonition to me never to hope. A firm persuasion that I can never durably enjoy a comfortable state of mind, but must be depressed in proportion as I have been elevated, withers my joys in the bud,

and in a manner entombs them before they are born; for I have no expectation but of sad vicissitude, and ever believe that the last shock will be fatal."

From his resumption of literary labour in 1787, down to the middle of 1791, he was busily occupied upon Homer, with little intervening periods given up to correspondence, to the company of friends who sought him out at Weston, and to the composition of various short original poems. His correspondence was enlarged during that period by the addition of letters to the Rev. Walter Bagot, and to Samuel Rose, son of Dr. William Rose, who kept a school at Chiswick, and was a literary man well known in his day. The younger Rose, in January, 1787, on his return from the University of Glasgow to London, called upon Cowper, with some pretence of returning the thanks of the Scottish professors for Cowper's two volumes of "Poems," but principally out of curiosity, and with a view to form an acquaintance with the author of "The Task." Cowper was pleased both with the compliment, and with the young man by whom it was paid, and rewarded him with a cordial intimacy. One other addition to the numerous roll of his correspondents was made in February, 1788, in the person of Mrs. King, wife of the Rev. John King, of Pertenhall, in the county of Bedford. Mr. King had been a Westminster boy, three years senior to Cowper, and Mrs. King had been intimate with Cowper's brother. In January, 1790, a still more important increase to the list of his resumed friendships, as well as to that of his correspondents,

was made by the opening of a communication with his maternal relatives. For seven-and-twenty years he had heard nothing of them. He knew not which of them were dead or which alive. In his youth there had been strict intimacies between him and several of his cousins, children of his mother's brothers, and especially with those of her elder brother, the Rev. Roger Donne, Rector of Catfield in Norfolk. The long silence was broken by the unheralded arrival at Weston of a young Cambridge student, who introduced himself to Cowper as a grandson of that Roger Donne. Roger Donne himself had died in 1773. His daughter Catherine had preceded him to the grave in 1770, but she had married a John Johnson, and had left two children, Catherine and John. Her son, John Johnson, born eight months before the death of his mother, was the young gentleman who now presented himself to the poet, fortifying the story of his Donne descent, not merely with the fullest details of his family history, but by submitting to Cowper's judgment a poem, which, after a little endeavour to pass it off as written by somebody else, he blushingly admitted to have been composed by himself. Such evidences that the true Donne blood ran in his veins were more than sufficient to induce Cowper to admit the youth to his heart. "The wild boy," as he terms him, instantly became an object of "great affection." "There is a simplicity in his character," Cowper reports to Lady Hesketh, "that charms me, and the more because it is so great a rarity. Humour he certainly has, and of the most agreeable kind.

His letter to you proves it, and so does his poem; and that he has many other talents which at present his shyness too much suppresses." The "kinsman," as he delighted to call himself, who thus claimed the privilege of acquaintance, possessed a heart as warmly affectionate as that of Cowper himself. He not only ultimately repaid the poet to the full for all his kindness, but almost immediately procured him one of the greatest gratifications of his life. On his return into Norfolk Johnson spread the tidings of his visit to Weston among all the Donnes, and, having perceived with what an intense degree of pleasure Cowper dwelt on the memory of his long-lost mother, Johnson procured his aunt, Cowper's cousin Ann Bodham, wife of the Rev. Thomas Bodham of Mattishall, formerly a fellow of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, to send him, as a present, the only known portrait in existence of her aunt, Cowper's mother—an original in oils by Heins. How this gift was welcomed and valued by him, and in what manner he commemorated its receipt, are facts known to all the world. "I received it," he says, "with a trepidation of nerves and spirits somewhat akin to what I should have felt had the dear original presented herself to my embraces. I kissed it, and hung it where it is the last object that I see at night, and of course, the first on which I open my eyes in the morning." The poem which he wrote on the subject is unquestionably one of the most beautiful in our language. Among other poems written at this period were "The Wish, or New Year's Gift," addressed to Mrs. Throckmorton, poems on

the "Slave Trade," lines on the "Death of his Uncle Ashley Cowper," the pretty lines on "Beau and the Water Lily," lines on the "King's Recovery," and several others. As of old, whatever stirred his feelings deeply produced a poem.

On the 8th September, 1790, Johnson of Norfolk conveyed the manuscript of the translation of Homer to Johnson of St. Paul's Churchyard, and on the 12th June, 1791, the last proof-sheet was returned for press. No one will dispute the high merit of this work as a translation, its far greater fidelity to the original than that of Pope, and the many beauties in it which have been brought to light by critical examination, but that it should have occupied seven years of the life of the author of "The Task," and those years between the ages of fifty and sixty, is a circumstance to be deeply deplored. That it answered the valuable purpose of giving him constant occupation is unquestionable, but the occupation was not in the highest degree congenial or suitable to him. The minute criticisms of others tormented him, and principally so because the consideration of their justice or the contrary belonged to a branch of literature with which he was not perfectly familiar, nor could make himself so without access to books. Regarded in relation to the circumstances under which it was executed, it is a wonderful and highly creditable work; but standing, as it probably does, in our literature in the place of several original works from the same pen, it can never be looked upon otherwise than with regret.

On the publication of his Homer one of his

earliest correspondents was his old friend Thurlow, the Lord Chancellor. Marvellous was Cowper's delight when his cousin, Henry Cowper, forwarded to him a letter, or, as Thurlow termed it, a scribble, written shortly after the publication of the poet's translation, on the old question of whether Homer could be best rendered in rhyme or in blank verse. Cowper immediately answered the Chancellor. Two or three letters followed on each side, and ultimately Thurlow acknowledged himself to be "clearly convinced that Homer may be better translated than into rhyme," and that Cowper had succeeded in the places he had looked into.

The mention of Thurlow's name gives an opportunity of saying a few words on his conduct towards Cowper. When Cowper published his proposals for translating Homer, he wrote upon the subject to Thurlow, but without receiving any answer. Lady Hesketh, probably judging that what with clerks, and secretaries, and the multitude of claims upon the attention of so eminent a functionary, such a letter as Cowper's might have failed to attract its proper share of notice, addressed the Chancellor herself. She did this privately, without Cowper's knowledge, and did not confine herself to soliciting his name as a subscriber to the Homer, but explained her cousin's position, and inquired whether the Lord Chancellor could not do something for his assistance. His answer seems to have been full and kind. He subscribed to the Homer, declared that he still remembered his old fellow-clerk with affection, and expressed a wish to serve him. Lady Hesketh sent the letter

to Cowper, who addressed the Chancellor in the following terms:—"Had my cousin consulted me before she made application to your lordship in my favour I should probably, at the same time that I honoured her for her zeal to serve me, have discouraged that proceeding. Not because I have no need of a friend, or because I have not the highest opinion of your constancy in that connection, but because I am sensible how difficult it must be, even for you, to assist a man in his fortunes who can do nothing but write verses, and who must live in the country. But should no other good effect ever follow her application than merely what has already followed it, an avowal on your lordship's part that you still remember me with affection, I shall be always glad that she acted as she did: she has procured me a gratification of which I shall always feel the comfort while I have any sensibility left. I know that your lordship would never have expressed even remotely a wish to serve me, had you not in reality felt one, and will therefore never lay my scantiness of income to your account, but should I live and die circumscribed as I am, and have been ever, in my finances, will impute it always to its proper cause, my own singularity of character, and not in the least to any deficiency of goodwill in your lordship's disposition towards me."

After the receipt of such a letter there can be no ground for asserting that Thurlow was ignorant of the poverty of his old friend until it was disclosed to him by Hayley in 1792. Lady Hesketh and Cowper laid the facts plainly before him

in August, 1788. It is clear that a pension, not an appointment, was the thing suitable for him; it is clear, also, beyond demonstration, that the author of "The Task" was entitled, in an unusual degree, to such a participation in the royal bounty. Can it be doubted, that if the Lord Chancellor had pleased, he might have procured a pension for his early friend? He made no endeavour to do so, and the pension which was ultimately obtained, was not obtained until after Thurlow had resigned the seal.

Homer was no sooner published than a multitude of suggestions for new subjects of labour were presented to Cowper's notice. Those who best knew what was necessary for his welfare, were most anxious to see him engaged in some constant and engrossing occupation. Original composition was urged upon him, and subjects for poems pointed out by several of his friends. Others proposed to him a third volume of poems, consisting partly of original productions, of which many were already scattered abroad in manuscript, and partly of translations. His publisher solved the doubt, by engaging him as editor of a magnificent edition of the poetical works of Milton, to be illustrated by Fuseli. No selection could have been more unwise or more unfortunate. One part of his duty would be to translate Milton's Latin and Italian poems. If original composition were not to be indulged in, that was labour which long practice had made easy to him, and which he was likely to execute with credit. But to illustrate the text of Milton's poems in notes which in many

cases would be frivolous or ignorant, if not prompted by acquaintance with that literature with which Milton was familiar, to draw the line between conflicting commentators, or to recover the meaning of allusions no longer understood, these were duties of an editor of such a work, for which Cowper was obviously incompetent. To engage in them was to put in peril his own happiness no less than the reputation he had acquired, and to sell himself and his name for a couple of years for the benefit of his publisher.

But that was not the opinion of the people who were most interested in his welfare. Mrs. Unwin and Lady Hesketh, the latter of whom was on a visit at Weston when the question was determined, were only anxious that he should be attracted to his desk by some constant occupation. They rejoiced over his new engagement as a source of health. But great changes were now approaching. The summer of the year which witnessed the publication of the Homer and the undertaking of the Milton was one of the busiest that had been seen at Weston. Cowper's Norfolk relations, Mrs. Balls, a sister of Mrs. Bodham, and her nephew "Johnny," as kinsman Johnson was now called, with his sister Catherine, then unmarried, paid the poet a long visit, and were so delighted with him and with Weston that the two latter, whose surviving parent had died shortly before Johnson's first visit to Weston, endeavoured to make arrangements for coming to reside there. The Throckmortons during the same summer were at the Hall, not only Cowper's favourite "Mrs. Frog,"

but many other visitors, including his other favourite, her friend Catharina, only daughter of Thomas Stapleton, Esq., of Carlton, in the county of York. This lady was shortly to become the wife of Mr. George Throckmorton, or, as he was called, Courtenay, younger brother to Mr. John Throckmorton, husband of Mrs. Frog, and Cowper's first friend in this family. During the stay of Catharina, a highly accomplished young beauty, who sang and played "like an angel," the Hall was full of company, and the village at its gayest. In the autumn Lady Hesketh came to add to its attractions, and to the delight of Cowper. The life which Cowper passed at such times may be gathered from a description by Rose, which although primarily applicable to the year 1788, was equally true of 1791—but, alas! no longer. "We rise," he says, "at whatever hour we choose, breakfast at half after nine, take about an hour to satisfy the sentiment, not the appetite—for we talk, Good heavens, how we talk! and enjoy ourselves most wonderfully. Then we separate and dispose of ourselves as our different inclinations point." At the time when this was written Cowper pursued his translation of Homer, Rose transcribed what was already translated, Lady Hesketh employed herself in work and books alternately, and Mrs. Unwin was engaged in house affairs. "At one," the account continues, "our labours finished, the poet and I walk for two hours. I then drink most plentiful draughts of instruction which flow from his lips, instruction so sweet and of goodness so exquisite, that one loves it for its flavour. At

three we return and dress, and the succeeding hour brings dinner upon the table and collects again the smiling countenances of the family to partake of the neat and elegant meal. Conversation continues till tea-time, when an entertaining volume engrosses our thoughts till the last meal is announced. Conversation again, and then to rest before twelve, to enable us to rise again to the same round of innocent and virtuous pleasure."

This cheerful jocund life, in which every moment seemed filled by an agreeable alternation of occupation and enjoyment, was put an end to by the illness of Mrs. Unwin. She had long been ailing. Head-aches, a pain in her side, and a lameness brought on by a fall, presumed to have been accidental, had made her a good deal of an invalid. In December, 1791, she was seized with paralysis. The attack was not severe, and after a few weeks it yielded, but not entirely, to medical treatment. During her illness Cowper attended upon the friend and companion who had so often been his nurse, with most affectionate watchfulness, and reported her improvement to his friends with evident delight. By March she had pretty well recovered, and was able to enter into various changes which were then taking place around them. Much about the time of her attack, Sir Robert Throckmorton died, the aged grandfather of Cowper's friend, Mr. John Throckmorton, who succeeded to the baronetcy, and he and "Mrs. Frog," now Lady Throckmorton, removed to Bucklands, in Berkshire, their principal family seat, leaving Weston Hall to the occupation of his younger

brother, Mr. George Courtenay, who was preparing for his marriage with Catharina. Lady Hesketh, who had remained at Weston through the winter, and consequently through the illness of Mrs. Unwin, returned to London a few days after the departure of the Throckmortons, and Cowper and his enfeebled companion were "once more reduced to their dual state." But his celebrity had now deprived their life of a good deal of its seclusion. The occurrence of fresh incidents was no new thing among them. He had lately added Hurdis, the author of the "Village Curate," and the future professor of poetry, with Thomas Park, the antiquary, to the list of his correspondents, and was about to enter into terms of familiarity with a literary person of still greater celebrity. The edition of Milton, which Cowper had agreed to edit, became the subject of much trade rivalry, Boydell being at the same time about to follow his Shakespeare with a companion edition of our other greatest poet. Johnson had secured Fuseli as illustrator, Boydell had retained Westall, and apart from the ordinary interest attaching to two magnificent competitive editions, there was a side squabble between Boydell and Fuseli. The newspapers delighted in publishing little paragraphs in relation to a subject of considerable literary interest, and among other things represented the rival editors, Cowper and Hayley, as entering warmly into the disputes between the other parties to these editions, and as both emulously engaged in writing lives of Milton. Cowper disregarded this foolish tittle-tattle, but Hayley deemed

it worthy of notice. Although himself a prominent poet of the day, he entertained no spark of jealousy towards Cowper, by whose rising fame his own reputation was being eclipsed. Afraid lest Cowper should suppose him capable of any such feeling, he addressed him in a sonnet, in which with considerable humility he disclaimed all rivalry, and professed his admiration for the works of his fellow-editor :—

> "No! let us meet with kind fraternal aim,
> Where Milton's shrine invites a votive throng;
> With thee I share a passion for his fame,
> His zeal for truth, his scorn of venal blame,
> But thou hast rarer gifts; to thee belong
> His harp of highest tone, his sanctity of song."

He inclosed this sonnet in a warm-hearted letter to Cowper, who responded with equal fervency, esteeming a friendship with Hayley "the chief acquisition that his own verse had ever procured him." Further correspondence attracted the two poets more and more to each other. In May, 1792, Hayley visited Cowper at Weston, and was enraptured with his reception, with his host, whom he described as one of the most interesting creatures in the world, and with Mrs. Unwin, "a Muse of seventy," whom he perfectly idolized. "Their tender attention to each other, their simple devout gratitude for the mercies which they had experienced together, and their constant but unaffected propensity to impress on the mind and heart of a new friend the deep sense which they incessantly felt of their mutual obligations to each other, afforded me," remarks Hayley, "very singular gratification."

Hayley had been at Weston but a few days when Mrs. Unwin was seized with an alarming attack of paralysis. Cowper was entirely unmanned, whilst Hayley was of the greatest service by his calmness and self-possession. He had been accustomed to practice electricity upon himself and his neighbours in Sussex, he now tried it upon Mrs. Unwin. Under its influence, or that of other remedial agents prescribed by the Olney apothecary, and by Dr. Austin, whom Hayley consulted by letter, the invalid shortly began to recover. Her power of speech partly returned, and she was able with assistance, usually that of Cowper's arm, to creep about the house. But her amendment was slow and uncertain. To help on its progress, Hayley urged a visit to himself at Eartham, between Chichester and Arundel. Such a journey was regarded by Cowper as an adventure; "a thousand lions, monsters, and giants" were deemed to be in the way; but for Mrs. Unwin's sake, and with the assistance of "Johnny of Norfolk," he agreed to face what he esteemed its perils. Abbott, an artist whom the Norfolk Johnson had sent to Weston to paint his portrait, hired for him a carriage and four in London, which conveyed them in safety over "the tremendous height of the Sussex hills." Rose met them at Barnet, where they passed the first night. General Cowper dined with them at Kingston, whence they journeyed to Ripley, which was their second stage. Late on the third evening they arrived at Eartham, where their reception was "the kindest that it

was possible for friendship and hospitality to contrive."

This journey was an incident of peculiar interest in Cowper's life. It was many years since he had gone so far afield; under Hayley's roof he became personally known to several celebrated people—to Romney, the artist, who took a portrait of him in crayons, to Hurdis, and to Charlotte Smith—and in that beautiful country he partook in a change of air and scene calculated to be beneficial to him both in mind and body. But after six weeks he began to pine for the "snug concealment" of his Buckinghamshire retreat. "Here," he remarked, in a letter to Lady Hesketh, "I see from every window woods like forests, and hills like mountains—a wilderness, in short, that rather increases my natural melancholy, and which, were it not for the agreeables I find within, would soon convince me that mere change of place can avail me little." Nor was the benefit derived by Mrs. Unwin very considerable. At the close of their visit, she still wanted help when she would rise from her seat, and a support in walking; her sight and her hand still failed her, so that she could neither read nor work. On their return journey, they visited General Cowper at Ham, slept a night at Kingston, breakfasted one morning at Rose's house in Chancery Lane, where Cowper, overwhelmed, sat at the corner of the fire-place in total silence, and reached Weston at eight in the evening of the fourth day.

From this time the shadows of the coming night gradually deepened around both of them. Their

return home was on the 19th September, 1792. Throughout 1793, Mrs. Unwin's infirmities increased by slow degrees, and Cowper resigned himself to attendance upon her. Before she rose in the morning, he devoted an hour or two to a revision of his Homer, smoothing roughnesses of expression, and preparing for a new edition. After breakfast, he yielded himself entirely to his correspondence, and to the performance of little services for the invalid. As her debility increased, her requirements became more and more incessant, but Cowper submitted without hesitation to all her fancies. Thus occupied, the "Miltonic trap" into which he had fallen became a source of constant trouble to him. Day by day he fixed a period for resuming his editorial work, but the task was distasteful, and from time to time was again speedily abandoned. In the meantime his mind became actively diseased. He imagined that audible communications were made to him by invisible beings, and that on waking in the morning suggestions were poured into his ear. Both he and Mrs. Unwin, whose enfeebled mind was now in a condition to yield to any crazy fancy, speculated upon and brooded over the wild conceits by which his intellect was thus led astray. These flights of a frenzied imagination not only absorbed his thoughts, but formed the subject of a singular correspondence with a fanatical dreamer at Olney, a poor half-witted schoolmaster named Teedon. Cowper's letters to this paltry person furnish melancholy evidence of the gradual way in which his reason again became

undermined. They show also the particular side, if the phrase may be allowed, on which his mind lay most open to assault.

The following letter, which the Editor believes has never before been printed, shows what was the state of things with Mrs. Unwin in October, 1793. Mr. John Unwin, son of the Rev. William Cawthorne Unwin, and therefore a grandson of Mrs. Unwin, not having seen her for a long time, probably not during the whole period of his education, wrote to propose to pay her a visit. Cowper answered him as follows:—

"My dear Sir,—It is most painful and mortifying not only to Mrs. Unwin, but to myself likewise, that the great weakness of her present condition, both in health and spirits, will not allow her the happiness of seeing you. Dear to her as is the memory of your father, it is not possible that she should see and converse with a son of his, whom she has not seen so many years, without more emotion than she can undergo without injury. It is not more than a month since I wrote, by her desire, to Mrs. Powley, to prevent her coming as she proposed. I am in no pain about the interpretation you will put on this negative, assured that your candour and kindness will direct you to the best and only just one. The very proposal, to say the truth, disordered her yesterday not a little, and to a degree that she has not yet recovered.

"She begs you to accept her affectionate best wishes, to which I add my own with great sincerity, and remain, dear Sir, very warmly and truly yours,

"Wm. Cowper.

"Weston, Oct. 29, 1793."

To this distressing period must be referred his lines "To Mary," of which Hayley truly remarks that "no language on earth can exhibit a specimen of verse more exquisitely tender." The personal particulars which it touched upon make of themselves a picture which no biographer could have portrayed with anything like the same effect;—its pathos belongs, of course, entirely to the poet. Her gradual loss of strength and spirits, her rusted knitting-needles, rendered useless by decay of sight, the indistinctness of articulation which made her spoken words "like language uttered in a dream," the silver locks, "once auburn bright," the hands hanging listless and languid, which yet being gently pressed, "press gently mine," the feebleness of limbs which required that at every step she moved she should be

> "Upheld by two;—yet still thou lovest!
> And still to love, though pressed with ill,
> In wintry age to feel no chill,
> With me is to be lovely still,
> My Mary!"

Language the most simple is made, throughout this masterpiece of pathetic genius, to produce effects which are not merely felicitous, but incomparable.

During this sad year, 1793, his friends strove to rouse his flagging spirits. Rose, Johnson, Hayley, Lady Hesketh, all visited him. Rose took with him the future Sir Thomas Lawrence, and secured a third original portrait, the well-known one in which the poet is represented in the

> "Cap that so stately appears,"

for which he was indebted to Lady Hesketh.

But the house at Weston was rapidly losing the charms which had so recently rendered it a delightful place to visitors. Mrs. Unwin's imbecility was unaccompanied by any consciousness of the extent of her own incapacity. She contended for household power long after she had become totally incapable of exercising it judiciously, and called upon everybody about her for a degree of submission to silly whimsies, which nobody yielded save Cowper himself. He waited upon her like a page, and humoured her in everything, however unreasonable. Their servants, on the other hand, who were rendered more numerous by Mrs. Unwin's illness, took advantage of the absence of judicious control, and were unchecked, if not in some cases supported, by poor Mrs. Unwin, in their irregularities. Cowper's thousand pounds, which was paid him by Johnson for his Homer, was rapidly disappearing. Hayley visited Weston in November, and saw clearly what was the state of things. Cowper urged him to prolong his stay, but he hurried away, as he says, from a conviction that he could serve him better elsewhere. On his return through London he made such representations to Cowper's friends as induced them—whom has not yet appeared, but certainly Rose, and we will hope Thurlow—to make a strenuous attempt to procure him a pension. Hayley was succeeded at Weston by Lady Hesketh, who now indeed proved herself to be the true friend which Cowper always supposed her to be. She came with the intention of remaining as usual through the winter. She did so; and what a winter must that have been!

Mrs. Unwin, sunk into a condition of mere second childhood, was often foolishly touchy, perverse, and irritable, the very opposite of her former self. Cowper, although relieved from the burthen of Milton, through the concurrence of Johnson the publisher in its temporary suspension, grew gradually more and more dejected, until the second week of February, 1794, when he fell again into a condition of mania. The melancholy that now settled upon him was of the deepest kind, and was mixed up with the saddest delusions. Had Lady Hesketh not been at Weston, his biography might have closed at this time in some fearful manner. Johnson, his kinsman, ever full of active kindness, was the first, after several weeks, to come to his help. But Cowper was past all persuasion or control. His state became worse and worse, until at length he not only refused medicine, but for six days sat "still and silent as death, and took no other food than now and then a very small piece of bread dipped in water sometimes mixed with a little wine." In this state of things Hayley was appealed to. It was hoped that the influence he had acquired might still be submitted to, even in the midst of insanity. Hayley did not hesitate to obey the call. But his presence had lost all its charm. Cowper shrunk from every one, and preferred to remain apart in continual silence and reserve.

Lady Hesketh took advantage of Hayley's presence at Weston to visit Dr. Willis, who had shortly before been in attendance upon George III. during his attack of insanity. She went backed by a

letter from Lord Thurlow recommending the case to his particular attention. Dr. Willis prescribed, and a short time afterwards visited the patient, but without effect. He recommended change of air and scene. The chief difficulty in acting upon such advice, or, indeed, in making any fresh arrangements, was found in the state of Mrs. Unwin, who opposed all schemes for his removal, or for the trial of anything new. And, however incapable she was perceived to be by everybody else, her opinion continued all-powerful with Cowper. Even after he had sunk almost into the very depths of his disease, he continued entirely at her beck and call. Sometimes she would not allow him to leave her even for a moment, sometimes she made him drag her round the garden in a wheel-chair, and on one occasion when he had long sat moodily silent, and apparently incapable of being aroused, upon her observation that she should like to try to walk, he instantly started to his feet and took her by the arm.

Whilst Hayley was still at Weston an incident occurred which must have been highly gratifying to him. A letter was received from Lord Spencer, announcing the success of the friendly application stirred up by Hayley, and the grant to Cowper of a royal pension of 300*l.* per annum, payable to his friend Rose as his trustee. Cowper himself was too ill at the time to open the letter, or even to be informed of its contents. Such an addition to his funds cleared away all money difficulties, but all other difficulties still remained. Lady Hesketh had continued at Weston for eighteen

months. Cowper's condition, although somewhat changed, was melancholy in the extreme. Instead of sitting constantly still, he now walked incessantly backwards and forwards either in his study or his bed-chamber. "He really does not sometimes sit down for more than half an hour the whole day, except at meal-times, when, as I before said," it is Lady Hesketh who is writing, "he takes hardly anything. He has left off bathing his feet, will take no laudanum, and lives in a constant state of terror that is dreadful to behold. He is now come to expect daily, and even hourly, that he shall be carried away; and kept in his room from the time breakfast was over till four o'clock on Sunday last, in spite of repeated messages from *Madame*, because he was afraid somebody would take possession of his bed, and prevent his lying down on it any more."

Whilst things were in this sorrowful plight the sympathetic kinsman Johnson suggested that the two patients should try the effect of a summer passed on the coast of Norfolk. Greatly to the astonishment of Lady Hesketh, Johnson succeeded in obtaining their consent, and on the 28th July, 1795, they quitted Weston for ever. The proposal was intended to have been merely for the summer, but Cowper truly anticipated its final character. On a panel of the window-shutter of his bed-chamber, he wrote with a black-lead pencil the following lines:—

"Farewell, dear scenes, for ever closed to me,
Oh, for what sorrows must I now exchange you!"

The journey into Norfolk was accomplished with comparative comfort, and several weeks were passed, but with little benefit, at Mundesley, a watering-place on the coast. All idea of returning to Weston seems to have been immediately abandoned, and on leaving Mundesley they removed to Dunham Lodge, near Swaffham, which Johnson took as a settled residence for Mrs. Unwin, Cowper, Johnson himself, his sister, and Miss Perowne, one of those excellent women who devote themselves to the companionship of the aged and afflicted. The situation of Dunham Lodge being found inconvenient, they again removed to Mundesley for the summer of 1796, and in the October of that year, with Cowper's full concurrence, took up their abode at East Dereham, which had previously been the ordinary place of residence of Johnson, who had two churches in that neighbourhood to serve on Sundays as curate. Mrs. Unwin did not long survive this last removal. She sank by a gentle decay, and after lying for several days in a perfectly hopeless state, expired on the 17th December without pain or struggle. It had been Cowper's custom to visit her bedside daily, immediately after breakfast, but without making any comments on her condition. On the morning of her departure, when a servant came into his bed-room to open the shutters of the window, he anxiously enquired, "Sally, is there life above stairs?" On the same morning, half an hour before her death, he paid his customary visit to her chamber. Returning to an apartment below, Johnson, who was in the

habit of reading aloud to him, instantly plunged into the volume which at that time was under perusal, with the view of drawing his mind from a consideration of the melancholy scene of which he had just been a witness. The book was Miss Burney's "Camilla." Johnson "had scarcely advanced a few pages before he was beckoned out of the room, to be informed of the death of Mrs. Unwin." He returned after some moments. As he was sitting down to the book, and turning over the leaves to resume his reading, he observed to the poet, that his poor old friend had breathed her last. The "intelligence was received by Cowper, though not entirely without emotion, yet with such as was compatible with" the resumption of the reading. In the evening he was taken to view the corpse. After gazing on it for a few moments, "and starting suddenly away with a vehement but unfinished sentence of passionate sorrow," he never again spoke of Mrs. Unwin.

Every thing that kindness could devise for Cowper's comfort was studied and practised by the amiable people among whom his lot was now cast. Miss Perowne won upon him until she began to exercise something of an Unwin-like influence. Johnson attended to his wants with all the tenderness of a son, provided for his health and amusement, and tried by a variety of little stratagems to allure him to the resumption of his literary occupations. Nor was he altogether unsuccessful. The translation of Homer underwent another revision, and Cowper wrote one or two original poems. The last of them, entitled "The

Castaway," founded upon an incident related in "Anson's Voyages," with a personal application to what his madness persuaded him was his own case, was written on the 20th March, 1799. But no kindness, nor occupation, nor amusement, could alleviate the deadly self-torturing gloom which settled heavily upon his latest years.

A removal to a more commodious house in East Dereham took place in December, 1799. Early in the following year his constitution rapidly gave way. Dropsy supervened. His weakness gradually increased. For a few weeks he was confined to his bed, and from the middle of April, 1800, it became evident that death was approaching. In the night of the 24th April, he remarked to Miss Perowne, on her presenting to him some refreshment, "What can it signify?" These were his last words. He gently ceased to breathe at five in the afternoon of the following day.

Mrs. Unwin and he were interred in the church of East Dereham, but not in the same grave; she in the north aisle, he in St. Edmund's Chapel. Monuments were erected to them, with inscriptions written by Hayley; that to Cowper by Lady Hesketh, Mrs. Unwin's by two friends, whose names have not transpired. The time, it may be hoped, is not far distant, when a memorial of Cowper will find a place in the temple consecrated to our poets.

The circumstances of Cowper's life were altogether special and peculiar;—the results of his character and of the state of disease which mixed itself up, more or less, with all the incidents and

affairs in which he was engaged. There is an interest in these circumstances, arising out of their mere singularity, and the disclosures respecting the character of his madness, which they involve. But all judgment respecting his conduct and actions should be modified by a consideration of his infirmity. That a man so afflicted should have been able, oftentimes in the very throes and agonies of his despair, to exercise to such good purpose his very peculiar gifts, is without a parallel. His letters, by their playfulness and humour, his poetry, by its simplicity and ease, and by the purity of its moral and religious teaching, have taken their place among English classics. Their reputation is derived from their truthfulness and absence of affectation, and will last as long as it is admitted that those qualities are the foundation of all excellence, whether in life or literature.

APPENDIX,

CONTAINING UNPUBLISHED PAPERS RECENTLY BROUGHT TO LIGHT.

WE remarked in a previous part of this volume that the information respecting Cowper's circumstances and mode of life is at present cumulative. Since those words were written, and whilst —in the midst of many interruptions from more urgent avocations—we have been gradually passing the Poems through the press, some hitherto unprinted papers have come to our knowledge which we take this mode of communicating to our readers.

The first of these new papers relates principally to a subject of inquiry which has been but lightly touched upon by Cowper's biographers—his means of livelihood. The gradual diminution of his original resources, whencesoever derived, and also of the small additions to which he succeeded on the deaths of his father and brother, has been well known, and so also that some of his relations, by contribution among themselves, made up an annual allowance, which he never scrupled to accept.

The following letter puts this matter for the first time plainly before us. It also brings to light that the third Earl Cowper, a grandson of the Chancellor, and a first cousin of the poet, was a considerable, although hitherto an unsuspected, contributor to the fund raised by the poet's relations. This delicate link between the poet and the head of his house explains why Hayley, in 1803, dedicated his Life of the Poet to the then successor in the earldom, a son of the poet's benefactor. This letter also shows what were the little complications which naturally arose out of the ambiguous character of the relations between the poet and Mrs. Unwin.

WILLIAM COWPER TO THE REV. WILLIAM UNWIN.*

Olney, July 10, 1786.

My dear William.—Having risen somewhat earlier than has been usual with me of late, and finding myself, in consequence of it, in possession of a vacant half-hour, I devote it, notwithstanding the indulgence granted me to be silent, to you, and the rather, because I have other good news to add to that which has already given you so much pleasure, and am unwilling that a friend who interests himself so much in my well-being, should wait longer than is absolutely necessary for his share of my joy.

Within this twelvemonth my income has received an addition of a clear £100 per *annum*. For a considerable part of it I am indebted to my dear cousin† now on the other side of the orchard. At Florence‡ she obtained me twenty

* Additional MS. Brit. Mus. 24,155, fol. 123.

† Of course Lady Hesketh, who was at this time lodging in the vicarage house at Olney. Memoir, p. cxxvi.

‡ George Nassau Clavering Cowper, third Earl Cowper, a godson of King George II., resided for many years at Florence. He married in that city, and his children were born there.

pounds a year from Lord Cowper; since he came home she has recommended me with such good effect to his notice, that he has added twenty more, twenty she has added herself, and ten she has procured me from the William of my name whom you saw at Hartingfordbury. From my anonymous friend,* who insists on not being known or guessed at, and never shall by me, I have an annuity of fifty pounds. All these sums have accrued within this year, except the first, making together, as you perceive, an exact century of pounds annually poured into the replenished purse of your once poor poet of Olney. Is it possible to love such a cousin too much, who so punctually fulfils her promise that she made me at the first revival of our correspondence, to make it the chief comfort of her life, to promote, as much as possible, mine?

The more I see of the Throckmortons the more I like them. He is the most accomplished man of his years that I remember to have seen, is always sensible in conversation and kind in his behaviour, and conducts himself handsomely and unexceptionably in the business of landlord and tenant. She is cheerful and good-natured to the last degree, and is, as you suppose, a niece of Lord Petre's.

Since we dined with them, I have dined with Lady H[esketh] at Gayhurst. It happened, and it hurt us all, the Throckmortons as well as ourselves, that your mother was not asked, consequently did not go. At first I was doubtful whether I would go myself, but thinking it the part

* Cowper certainly submitted with very exemplary patience to the restraints imposed upon him by his anonymous friend. That he was ignorant from whose hand he received such generous aid cannot be supposed, notwithstanding his occasionally writing of her as if she were a person of the male sex. Some little time after this letter was written, he came very close upon her track. He received a letter announcing the dispatch of a writing-desk and pocket-book as a present for himself, with a work-box (oh amiable Theodora!) for Mrs. Unwin. The letter contained an allusion to a poem of Cowper's entitled a Drop of Ink. "The only copy," he slily remarked, when relating the circumstance to Lady Hesketh, "I ever gave of that piece, I gave yourself. It is possible, therefore, that between you and Anonymous there may be some communication." The "Drop of Ink" was doubtless the "Ode to Apollo," printed in our Vol. I. p. 231.

of charity to suppose that, obscurely as we have lived at Olney, a family five miles distant might not know that she existed, I went. To-day your mother will meet Mrs. Wrighte at dinner at Lady H's, and it will consequently no longer be a secret to said Mrs. Wrighte that there is such a person as Mrs. Unwin. We shall then see whether I am ever to visit again at Gayhurst or not.

Your mother's love with mine attends you all. She wishes that the fish may come on Thursday, else it must be eaten on Sunday, which is the only day when the Trio do not meet. I am summoned to breakfast,

Yours, my dear William,
W. C.

We long for the 18th.

July 11. Your mother has been asked to Gayhurst, and will be of the party the next time we go. Lady H. sends her compliments; nobody now stands so fair as yourself for her chaplainship,—you need only come and enter immediately on your office.

The second of our fresh accession of unpublished papers is no other than an outline of a sermon written by Cowper. His friend, William Unwin, having been appointed to preach before the judges of assize for the County of Essex, applied to Cowper, as he did on many other occasions when he needed either poetry or prose, for assistance. In reply, Cowper sent the following outline of a suitable discourse. It will be found interesting, not merely as giving an idea of the kind of composition which Cowper thought proper for such an occasion, but as a clear development of his doctrinal views on a theological subject of great importance.

SKETCH OF AN ASSIZE SERMON.*

"*For God is judge himself.*"—Ps. l. v. 6.

1. Who is meant by God in this place—viz., the Lord Jesus Christ.

* Additional MS. Brit. Mus. 24,155, fol. 93.

Proof:—"The Father hath committed all judgment to the Son."

2. He exercises his office even now. He is the Governor of the Universe.

Proof:—"All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth;" consequently he is the dispenser of all temporary retribution, by whose providence guilt is even now detected, and crimes are punished.

3. But the full display of his judicial authority is reserved to a future day.

His qualifications to hold that grand assize.

1. As acquainted with all facts and having no need of witnesses, or of any other, at least, than the conscience of the criminal.

2. As equally possessed of all the secrets of the heart; the only possible judge of motives, under whose cognizance alone can come the stress of temptation; and

3. As alone apprized of all the consequences of a guilty action, which none can know at present, but which will all be taken into the account hereafter.

4. From Him is all authority, and the judicial is especially referred to in that text, "By me Kings reign and Princes decree justice."

[5. To Him] also the Judges of the Earth are indebted e[ven] for that ability [without] which they would be unequal to their great charge. He is the * * [worn away] through which all is communicated which man receives; the a * * of intellect, the dispenser of the gifts of nature as well as of grace.

Proof:—"The light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world."

6. Consider the great felicity of this country, in which justice is administered with such unimpeachable integrity; where the trial is *per pares*, and the judge is only the organ by which the law pronounces.

7. An appeal lies from an human judicature, even in favour of the most guilty, to the mercy of God. But from the sentence of the great Judge of all, there is no appeal; which may afford ground for a warm exhortation of the prisoners, who ought not to be forgot, but rather largely remembered, and who, I conceive, are always present upon these occasions.

If you can make any use of it, it may be said of me, "Who being dead, yet preacheth."

Yours, W. C.

Saturday morning.

It will be remembered by those who are familiar with the history of Cowper's latest years, that his kind and amiable relative, Dr. John Johnson, presented him with "an antique bust" of Homer, on receipt of which, Cowper addressed his young relation in the well-known stanzas commencing, "Kinsman beloved, and as a son, by me!" It appears, also, that Cowper set his "dear old Grecian" on a pedestal, on which he inscribed two Greek lines, with an English version, both printed in our vol. iii. pp. 408, 409. This bust, still standing on its inscribed pedestal, may be found in the wilderness at Weston, whither it was transferred probably on Cowper's removal from that village, or when Weston House, the seat of the Throckmortons, was pulled down. Ere long, it may be hoped, so valuable a relic will find a more fitting place of shelter.

The previous history of this bust has been a frequent subject of consideration with those who feel an interest in everything relating to Cowper. Whence did it come? How did Johnson become possessed of it? Is it really a bust of Homer? These are questions to which no answer has been returned, nor indeed is it in our power to reply to them. But the kindness of S. W. Rix, Esq., of Beccles, enables us to show something of the pains which were taken by Dr. Johnson to gratify his gifted relative in this particular.

It seems that Mr. Plowman, a gentleman residing at Bungay, and a friend of the future Dr. John Johnson, had adorned his garden with a statue of Achilles. In the summer of 1792 Johnson chanced

to mention the fact to Cowper, who expressed a wish that his garden could possess an ornament so germane to his recent labours in the translation of Homer. Ever studious to accomplish anything which would be a gratification to Cowper, the warm-hearted Johnson instantly solicited the gift of this statue from Mr. Plowman. This he did in a letter which chances to have come into the possession of Mr. Rix. Long as it is, this letter is so characteristic of its simple-minded, kindly writer, and is so full of information respecting Cowper, that our readers will be thankful, as we are, that Mr. Rix gives us permission to publish it.

JOHN JOHNSON TO MR. PLOWMAN.*

Weston-Underwood, Bucks.
June 19th 1792.

My dear Sir.—You have often been pleased to say that my letters are welcome to you at whatever time and from whatever country, I may chance to address them. On the strength of so kind an assertion, therefore, I am preparing to tell you that I reached this delightfully retired village about ten days ago. My journey hither was wholly unexpected when I left Norfolk with our London party, but I had not been many days in town before I called on Lady Hesketh, and learned from her the distress of Mr. Cowper in consequence of his dear companion's illness. At the same time she earnestly recommended it as the most charitable thing I could do, viz., my going down into Bucks as soon as possible that I might keep up the spirits of my cousin in so great an affliction. I did not come hither immediately as I could not leave my party, and besides Mr. Hayley, the poet, was with him at that time, and therefore I was not immediately wanted; but about three days after, when Kitty and I dined at Lady Hesketh's, we had the pleasure of seeing Mr. Hayley, who

* From original in possession of Mr. Rix.

drank tea with us there, and was just returned from Weston, where he had spent a fortnight. This gentleman, who ranks high amongst our British poets, has lately formed a friendship with Mr. Cowper, and Mr. Cowper with him, such as may not be easily equalled. If you be not already weary I will give you the particulars of their coming together, which are truly curious. I must, however, premise, that Mr. Cowper was applied to last autumn by Fuseli the painter, to stand forth as the editor of a most magnificent edition of Milton's Works, to be published after the manner of Shakespeare, which has lately appeared, and which when completed will cost a hundred guineas a single copy. After two or three positive refusals Mr. Cowper at last consented to be the editor, and to give an extensive illustration on the subject of Milton's English poetry, and also to translate his Latin and Italian poems. He is, therefore, engaged by Fuseli and the rest of the proprietors to give the work the sanction of his name. Now, you must know, that all this was no sooner announced by advertisement, than a plan something similar was immediately started by John Nichols the bookseller and Mr. Boydell, who immediately published proposals for a splendid edition of Milton after the manner of Shakespeare, and under the sanction of Mr. Hayley's name. This had no sooner appeared, than some idle person inserted a paragraph in one of the papers, in which the world was given to understand that the two poets, Cowper and Hayley, were pitted against each other, and were coming forward as rival editors of Milton. This idle paragraph was no sooner read by Mr. Hayley, than he wrote directly to Mr. Cowper lamenting the circumstance and disclaiming all rivalship with him, in one of the handsomest letters I ever saw. At the same time he assured Mr. Cowper that their plans did not at all clash with each other, for he only meant to give a more accurate life of Milton than has already appeared, whereas Mr. Cowper's plan extended to all Milton's Works. He concluded his elegant letter with a most affectionate sonnet, in which he disclaimed all rivalship, and politely expressed himself unable to contest the point with him, even if he had wished it. This letter was unhappily delayed six weeks at Johnson's, Mr. Cowper's bookseller, by whose unpardonable neglect Hayley was kept in the greatest and most painful suspense. However, Mr. Cowper answered it directly, when he got it, and his letter so won the heart of his brother poet Hayley, that he immediately wrote him word, that he must either pay

him a visit at his house near Chichester in Sussex, or else that he must take a journey to Weston. The latter plan took place, and, as I said before, a friendship of uncommon degree is established between them. Which God preserve! say I, as an example to all future poets, for poets are too apt to be enemies. Mr. Hayley had not been here two days when Mrs. Unwin (the lady who has been a nurse, as it were, to cousin Cowper these thirty years) was seized with her second paralytic stroke. Hayley was now of the utmost service, both in comforting Mr. Cowper, and also in recovering Mrs. Unwin, for he has great skill in medical matters, and by the use of electricity he almost restored her. She is now greatly recovered, her speech and the use of her right side were at first quite lost, but now she can almost walk alone, and can speak tolerably plain. Hayley's extreme tenderness and attention were beyond parallel, Mr. Cowper says; and he has promised to visit him in the month of August at his house at Eartham near Chichester, if Mrs. Unwin continues to recover. Hayley was so polite as to honour me with an invitation when I saw him at Lady H's. By this time you must wish that Lady H. and Cowper and Hayley and your humble servant were all at old Nick's, and so I will make my bow and be off, swearing, however, point blank, that I am, as much as ever,

Your obliged and affectionate friend and servant,

I. JOHNSON.

But here comes the main point;—Mr. Cowper by accident heard me say the other day, that you had a statue of his hero Achilles in your possession, and several times since he has wished it was in his garden. Now I took no notice of the intention to him, but resolved to write a begging letter to you for it, as I know it would be the most welcome present in the world to him, and I will answer for his immortalizing your gift in a noble copy of verses to be handed down to posterity, from generation to generation. What makes me more desirous than ever to have it is the following circumstance. Two or three days ago as he and I were passing a carpenter's yard, he saw an immense block, the tail of a very large oak lately felled. Mr. Cowper immediately ordered the man to transport it into his garden, that it might terminate a beautiful walk which he has lately made in it. Accordingly it was transported thither, and yesterday was fixed immoveably. It is solid oak and nearly a yard in diameter. The foot of it is to be surrounded with moss and

the poet is to be visible all over it. Now, what a glorious thing would it be to set Achilles upon this massy slab of oak, without his knowing it, which I will engage to do if you will give me leave, and I will also select the lines from Cowper's Homer in which he has described Achilles in the attitude of your statue, and then I will get them painted or rather printed upon a board to be placed in front of the block, and then it will be complete! As for the carriage leave the ordering of that to me. I think it had best go from your house to Yarmouth, and there be shipped for Lynn, from whence it may go down the river Ouse to Bedford, which is not above ten miles from Mr. Cowper's. It would be a noble thing if it can be done, and will delight the translator of Homer inexpressibly. Since I began this last page Hayley's letter has come, and a most pleasant one it is. Among other things it recommends Mr. Cowper's going into Sussex in July instead of August, because of the days being longer then, and it also contains a most handsome invitation for me to accompany him thither, and therefore, if it can be placed up by the time Mr. Cowper comes back, it will be glorious indeed. Give me a line as soon as you receive this, only tell me whether you can spare it or not, and direct it to me at William Miller's, No 5 Old Bond Street, where I shall be for about a week or ten days to come. I shall return to Weston after my business is done in town, and I suppose about the second week in July we shall set out for Eartham. My business in town is of a nature that will furnish me with subject for another letter hereafter, if it succeed. My affectionate compliments to all your good family. I dare not ask for more than a line or two in answer to this, because I give you such short notice, but I think that the business might be done before we go into Sussex. If so, it would be a deal better, as I should be here to see it properly put up, in that case, before the poet is down stairs, so that he should know nothing of the matter; but, however, I almost despair of that, on account of the winds and tides, and, at all events, I can leave orders with the parson of the parish about it.

'The sequel of the transaction seems to have been, that from the difficulty of removal, or some other cause, Mr. Plowman did not comply with Johnson's request,* but that he, unwearied in his endeavour

* Mr. Plowman's Achilles subsequently came into the

to gratify Cowper's lightest wish, after twelve months' search, secured in some other quarter a bust of Homer, and presented it to his much-loved cousin.

Another subject of investigation in connection with Cowper's biography has been his pension. Upon whose application and recommendation was it granted? Above all things, did Lord Thurlow join in the recommendation? The editor thought these questions might have received an answer among the papers of the Treasury; but upon a search directed to be made by Thomas Duffus Hardy, Esq., the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records (ever ready to assist any literary inquirer), the editor is informed that nothing can be found among those papers but a copy of George III.'s Warrant for the pension, which runs as follows:—

ROYAL WARRANT FOR COWPER'S PENSION.*

GEORGE R.—Whereas we are graciously pleased to grant and allow unto Samuel Rose Esq. and to his executors or administrators, an annuity, or yearly pension of £300, in trust for William Cowper Esq., the same to commence from the 5th day of July 1794, OUR WILL AND PLEASURE is, that by virtue of our General letters of Privy Seal, bearing date the 5th day of November 1760, you do issue and pay or cause to be issued and paid, out of any our Treasure or Revenue in the receipt of the Exchequer applicable to the uses of our civil government, unto the said Samuel Rose Esq. and to his executors or administrators, the said annuity or yearly sum of £300, In Trust [for] and for the use of the above mentioned William Cowper, without account, to commence from the fifth day of July 1794, and to be paid Quarterly or otherwise as the same shall become due, and to continue during our

possession of the Rev. Alfred Suckling, who placed it, after several intermediate removals, in the garden of the rectory of Barsham, in Suffolk, where it still remains.

* King's Warrant Book, No. 74, p. 62.

pleasure. And for &c. Given &c. 1st of July 1794 in the 34th year of our reign. By his Majesty's Command.

W. PITT. J. T. TOWNSHEND. J. SMYTH.

Commissioners' Treasury.

Such papers, considered separately, may add but little to our knowledge of the life or labours of Cowper, but it is from the mass of such documents, all modifying or confirming the conclusions drawn from one another, that truth is ultimately arrived at. Every genuine paper is of importance, and therefore it is that we feel deeply grateful to all who have favoured us with such assistance. To those who have thus obliged us, and whom we have already commemorated, we have now to add the names of Miss Rowe, of Graham's Town, Edward Foss, Esq., of Churchill House, Dover, and Henry Southgate, Esq., of Fleet Street and Hackney.

One word, before we finally withdraw the pen, to correct a passage which, as it stands, may be misunderstood. At p. clx. it is stated that Cowper's friend, Rose, secured a third portrait of the poet, that by Lawrence, which is spoken of as "the well-known one in which the poet is represented in 'the cap that so stately appears.'" There are three portraits of Cowper, 1. by Abbott; 2. by Romney; 3. by Lawrence. The two latter both represent him in the well-known cap, but that of the future Sir Thomas Lawrence, from its being capable of being represented in a slight and sketchy style of engraving, is much the better known, and is indeed the foundation of the greater part of the multitude innumerable of cheap and popular representations which have familiarized the poet and his cap to the general eye.

POEMS

BY

WILLIAM COWPER,

Of the INNER TEMPLE, Esq.

Sicut aquæ tremulum labris ubi lumen ahenis
Sole repercuſſum, aut radiantis imagine lunæ,
Omnia pervolitat laté loca, jamque ſub auras
Erigitur, ſummique ferit laquearia tecti. VIRG. ÆN. VIII.

So water trembling in a poliſh'd vaſe,
Reflects the beam that plays upon its face,
The ſportive light, uncertain where it falls,
Now ſtrikes the roof, now flaſhes on the walls.

Nous ſommes nés pour la vérité, et nous ne pouvons ſouffrir ſon abord; les figures, les paraboles, les emblêmes, ſont toujours des ornements néceſſaires pour qu'elle puiſſe s'annoncer; et ſoit qu'on craigne qu'elle ne découvre trop bruſquement le défaut qu'on voudroit cacher, ou qu'enfin elle n'inſtruiſe avec trop peu de ménagement, on veut, en la recevant, qu'elle ſoit déguiſée.

CARACCIOLI.
["Jouiſſance de ſoi meme,"
cap. XI., ed. 1762.]

LONDON:
Printed for J. JOHNSON, No. 72, St. Paul's Church Yard.
1782.

[*Copy of the title-page of Cowper's firſt publication.*]

PREFACE.

WRITTEN BY THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

WHEN an Author, by appearing in print, requests an audience of the Public, and is upon the point of speaking for himself, whoever presumes to step before him with a Preface, and to say, "Nay, but hear me first," should have something worthy of attention to offer, or he will justly be deemed officious or impertinent. The judicious reader has probably, upon other occasions, been beforehand with me in this reflection: and I am not

* The Preface, which is here reprinted, was written, at Cowper's request, for publication in the first edition of the "Table Talk;" but being objected to by the publisher, on account of its plain statement of the religious views of the writer, it was withdrawn after it was in type, only a small impression being struck off. Newton says it was "bound up with some copies of the volume, and if a purchaser looked serious and methodistical, he probably was shewn one with a Preface; but promiscuous purchasers were not troubled with it." (*Correspondence with a Dissenting Minister*, 12mo. Lond. 1809, p. 124.) In 1790, when all fear of injury to the fame of the Poet was at an end, Newton requested that his Preface might in future be inserted. The request was complied with, and from that time few editions have been published without it.

very willing it should now be applied to me, however I may seem to expose myself to the danger of it. But the thought of having my own name perpetuated in connexion with the name in the title page is so pleasing and flattering to the feelings of my heart, that I am content to risk something for the gratification.

This Preface is not designed to commend the Poems to which it is prefixed. My testimony would be insufficient for those who are not qualified to judge properly for themselves, and unnecessary to those who are. Besides, the reasons which render it improper and unseemly for a man to celebrate his own performances, or those of his nearest relatives, will have some influence in suppressing much of what he might otherwise wish to say in favour of a friend, when that friend is indeed an *alter idem*, and excites almost the same emotions of sensibility and affection as he feels for himself.

It is very probable these Poems may come into the hands of some persons, in whom the sight of the author's name will awaken a recollection of incidents and scenes, which through length of time they had almost forgotten. They will be reminded of one, who was once the companion of their chosen hours, and who set out with them in early life in the paths which lead to literary honours, to influence and affluence, with equal prospects of success. But he was suddenly and powerfully withdrawn from those pursuits, and he left them without regret; yet not till he had sufficient opportunity of counting the cost, and of knowing the value of what he gave up. If happiness could have

been found in classical attainments, in an elegant taste, in the exertions of wit, fancy, and genius, and in the esteem and converse of such persons as in these respects were most congenial with himself, he would have been happy. But he was not. He wondered (as thousands in a similar situation still do) that he should continue dissatisfied, with all the means apparently conducive to satisfaction within his reach. But in due time the cause of his disappointment was discovered to him. He had lived without God in the world. In a memorable hour the wisdom which is from above visited his heart. Then he felt himself a wanderer, and then he found a guide. Upon this change of views, a change of plan and conduct followed of course. When he saw the busy and the gay world in its true light, he left it with as little reluctance as a prisoner, when called to liberty, leaves his dungeon. Not that he became a Cynic or an Ascetic; a heart filled with love to God will assuredly breathe benevolence to men. But the turn of his temper inclining him to rural life, he indulged it, and the providence of God evidently preparing his way and marking out his retreat, he retired into the country. By these steps, the good hand of God, unknown to me, was providing for me one of the principal blessings of my life; a friend and a counsellor, in whose company for almost seven years, though we were seldom seven successive waking hours separated, I always found new pleasure; a friend who was not only a comfort to myself, but a blessing to the affectionate poor people among whom I then lived.

Some time after inclination had thus removed him from the hurry and bustle of life, he was still more secluded by a long indisposition, and my pleasure was succeeded by a proportionable degree of anxiety and concern. But a hope that the God whom he served would support him under his affliction, and at length vouchsafe him a happy deliverance, never forsook me. The desirable crisis, I trust, is now nearly approaching. The dawn, the presage of returning day, is already arrived. He is again enabled to resume his pen, and some of the first fruits of his recovery are here presented to the public. In his principal subjects, the same acumen which distinguished him in the early period of life, is happily employed in illustrating and enforcing the truths of which he received such deep and unalterable impressions in his maturer years. His satire, if it may be called so, is benevolent, (like the operations of the skilful and humane surgeon, who wounds only to heal) dictated by a just regard for the honour of God, an indignant grief excited by the profligacy of the age, and a tender compassion for the souls of men.

His favourite topics are least insisted on in the piece entitled Table Talk; which, therefore, with some regard to the prevailing taste, and that those who are governed by it may not be discouraged at the very threshold from proceeding farther, is placed first. In most of the larger Poems which follow, his leading design is more explicitly avowed and pursued. He aims to communicate his own perceptions of the truth, beauty, and influence of the religion of the Bible—a religion, which, however

discredited by the misconduct of many who have not renounced the Christian name, proves itself, when rightly understood and cordially embraced, to be the grand *desideratum*, which alone can relieve the mind of a man from painful and unavoidable anxieties, inspire it with stable peace and solid hope, and furnish those motives and prospects, which, in the present state of things, are absolutely necessary to produce a conduct worthy of a rational creature, distinguished by a vastness of capacity which no assemblage of earthly good can satisfy, and by a principle and pre-intimation of immortality.

At a time when hypothesis and conjecture in philosophy are so justly exploded, and little is considered as deserving the name of knowledge, which will not stand the test of experiment, the very use of the term experimental in religious concernments is by too many unhappily rejected with disgust. But we well know, that they who affect to despise the inward feelings which religious persons speak of, and to treat them as enthusiasm and folly, have inward feelings of their own, which, though they would, they cannot suppress. We have been too long in the secret ourselves, to account the proud, the ambitious, or the voluptuous, happy. We must lose the remembrance of what we once were, before we can believe that a man is satisfied with himself, merely because he endeavours to appear so. A smile upon the face is often but a mask worn occasionally and in company, to prevent, if possible, a suspicion of what at the same time is passing in the heart. We know that there

are people who seldom smile when they are alone, who therefore are glad to hide themselves in a throng from the violence of their own reflections; and who, while by their looks and their language they wish to persuade us they are happy, would be glad to change their conditions with a dog. But in defiance of all their efforts they continue to think, forebode, and tremble. This we know, for it has been our own state, and therefore we know how to commiserate it in others. From this state the Bible relieved us. When we were led to read it with attention, we found ourselves described—we learnt the causes of our inquietude—we were directed to a method of relief—we tried, and we were not disappointed.

Deus nobis hæc otia fecit.

We are now certain that the Gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. It has reconciled us to God, and to ourselves, to our duty, and our situation. It is the balm and cordial of the present life, and a sovereign antidote against the fear of death.

Sed hactenus hæc. Some smaller pieces upon less important subjects close the volume. Not one of them, I believe, was written with a view to publication, but I was unwilling they should be omitted.

JOHN NEWTON.

Charles Square, Hoxton,
February 18, 1782.

TABLE TALK.*

Si te fortè meæ gravis uret sarcina chartæ,
Abjicito.

HOR. Lib. I. Ep. 13.

A.

YOU told me, I remember, glory built
On selfish principles, is shame and guilt;
The deeds that men admire as half divine,
Stark naught, because corrupt in their design.
Strange doctrine this! that without scruple tears
The laurel that the very lightning spares,
Brings down the warrior's trophy to the dust,
And eats into his bloody sword like rust.

B. I grant that men continuing what they are,
Fierce, avaricious, proud, there must be war;
And never meant the rule should be applied
To him that fights with Justice on his side.

* First published, in 1782, together with several of the following compositions, in an octavo volume. We have prefixed a full copy of the title-page. "Table Talk" sprung up, as Cowper remarked (*Letter to Unwin*, 1 May, 1781), in the month of December, 1780. It was sent to Newton complete, 18 February, 1781.

Let laurels drenched in pure Parnassian dews,
Reward his memory, dear to every Muse,
Who with a courage of unshaken root,
In Honour's field advancing his firm foot,
Plants it upon the line that Justice draws,
And will prevail or perish in her cause.
'Tis to the virtues of such men, man owes
His portion in the good that Heaven bestows;
And when recording History displays
Feats of renown, though wrought in ancient days,
Tells of a few stout hearts that fought and died
Where Duty placed them, at their country's side;
The man that is not moved with what he reads,
That takes not fire at their heroic deeds,
Unworthy of the blessings of the brave,
Is base in kind, and born to be a slave.

But let eternal Infamy pursue
The wretch, to naught but his ambition true,
Who for the sake of filling with one blast
The post-horns of all Europe, lays her waste.
Think yourself stationed on a towering rock,
To see a people scattered like a flock,
Some royal mastiff panting at their heels,
With all the savage thirst a tiger feels;
Then view him, self-proclaimed in a gazette,
Chief monster that has plagued the nations yet!
The globe and sceptre in such hands misplaced,
Those ensigns of dominion, how disgraced!
The glass that bids man mark the fleeting hour,
And Death's own scythe, would better speak his power;
Then grace the bony phantom in their stead
With the king's shoulder-knot and gay cockade;

Clothe the twin brethren in each other's dress,
The same their occupation and success.
A. 'Tis your belief the world was made for man,
Kings do but reason on the selfsame plan;
Maintaining yours, you cannot theirs condemn,
Who think, or seem to think, man made for them.
B. Seldom, alas! the power of logic reigns
With much sufficiency in royal brains;
Such reasoning falls like an inverted cone,
Wanting its proper base to stand upon.
Man made for kings! those optics are but dim
That tell you so—say, rather, they for him.
That were indeed a king-ennobling thought,
Could they, or would they, reason as they ought.
The diadem, with mighty projects lined,
To catch renown by ruining mankind,
Is worth, with all its gold and glittering store,
Just what the toy will sell for, and no more.
O bright occasions of dispensing good,
How seldom used, how little understood!
To pour in Virtue's lap her just reward;
Keep Vice restrained behind a double guard;
To quell the faction that affronts the throne,
By silent magnanimity alone;
To nurse with tender care the thriving Arts;
Watch every beam Philosophy imparts;
To give Religion her unbridled scope,
Nor judge by statute a believer's hope;
With close fidelity and love unfeigned,
To keep the matrimonial bond unstained;
Covetous only of a virtuous praise;
His life a lesson to the land he sways;
To touch the sword with conscientious awe,

Nor draw it, but when Duty bids him draw;
To sheath it, in the peace-restoring close,
With joy beyond what Victory bestows;
Blest country, where these kingly glories shine!
Blest England, if this happiness be thine!
A. Guard what you say; the patriotic tribe
Will sneer, and charge you with a bribe.—B. A bribe!
The worth of his three kingdoms I defy,
To lure me to the baseness of a lie.
And, of all lies (be that one poet's boast),
The lie that flatters I abhor the most.
Those arts be theirs that* hate his gentle reign,
But he that loves him has no need to feign.
A. Your smooth eulogium, to one crown addressed,
Seems to imply a censure on the rest.
B. Quevedo,† as he tells his sober tale,
Asked, when in Hell, to see the royal jail;
Approved their method in all other things,
"But where, good sir, do you confine your kings?"
"There," said his guide, "the group is full in view."
"Indeed," replied the Don, "there are but few."
His black interpreter the charge disdained—
"Few, fellow!—there are all that ever reigned."
Wit, undistinguishing, is apt to strike
The guilty and not guilty, both alike;
I grant the sarcasm is too severe,

* "That;" Eds. 1782, 1786, Southey, Bell. "Who;" Eds. 1787, 1788, 1793, 1794, 1798, 1799, 1800, 1803, 1805, 1806 (2), 1808, 1810, 1812, 1817, 1821, 1825, Grimshawe, Dale.

† Cowper's authority for this "sober tale" has not been found. The story does not occur in any acknowledged work of Quevedo.

And we can readily refute it here,
While Alfred's name, the father of his age,
And the Sixth Edward's, grace the historic page.
A. Kings then, at last, have but the lot of all;
By their own conduct they must stand or fall.
B. True. While they live, the courtly laureate pays
His quitrent ode, his peppercorn of praise,
And many a dunce, whose fingers itch to write,
Adds, as he can, his tributary mite;
A subject's faults a subject may proclaim,
A monarch's errors are forbidden game.
Thus free from censure, overawed by fear,
And praised for virtues that they scorn to wear,
The fleeting forms of majesty engage
Respect, while stalking o'er life's narrow stage;
Then leave their crimes for History to scan,
And ask, with busy scorn, "Was this the man?"
I pity kings whom Worship waits upon,
Obsequious, from the cradle to the throne;
Before whose infant eyes the flatterer bows,
And binds a wreath about their baby brows;
Whom Education stiffens into state,
And Death awakens from that dream too late.
Oh! if Servility with supple knees,
Whose trade it is to smile, to crouch, to please;
If smooth Dissimulation, skilled to grace
A devil's purpose with an angel's face;
If smiling peeresses, and simpering peers,
Encompassing his throne a few short years;
If the gilt carriage, and the pampered steed,
That wants no driving and disdains the lead;
If guards, mechanically formed in ranks
Playing, at beat of drum, their martial pranks,

Shouldering, and standing as if struck* to stone,
While condescending Majesty looks on;
If monarchy consist in such base things,
Sighing, I say again, I pity kings!
To be suspected, thwarted, and withstood,
E'en when he labours for his country's good;
To see a band, called patriot, for no cause
But that they catch at popular applause,
Careless of all the anxiety he feels,
Hook disappointment on the public wheels;
With all their flippant fluency of tongue,
Most confident, when palpably most wrong;
If this be kingly, then farewell for me
All kingship, and may I be poor and free!
To be the Table Talk of clubs up stairs,
To which the unwashed artificer repairs
To indulge his genius, after long fatigue,
By diving into cabinet intrigue,
(For what kings deem a toil, as well they may,
To him is relaxation and mere play;)
To win no praise when well-wrought plans prevail,
But to be rudely censured when they fail;
To doubt the love his favourites may pretend,
And in reality to find no friend;
If he indulge a cultivated taste,
His galleries with the works of art well graced,
To hear it called extravagance and waste;
If these attendants, and if such as these,
Must follow royalty, then welcome ease;

* "Struck;" Eds. 1782, 1786, 1808, 1825, Southey, Bell, Dale. "Stuck;" Eds. 1787, 1788, 1793, 1794, 1798, 1799, 1800, 1803, 1805, 1806 (2), 1810, 1812, 1817, 1821, Grimshawe.

However humble and confined the sphere,
Happy the state that has not these to fear.
A. Thus men, whose thoughts contemplative have dwelt
On situations that they never felt,
Start up sagacious, covered with the dust
Of dreaming study and pedantic rust,
And prate and preach about what others prove,
As if the world and they were hand and glove.
Leave kingly backs to cope with kingly cares,
They have their weight to carry, subjects theirs;
Poets, of all men, ever least regret
Increasing taxes and the nation's debt;
Could you contrive the payment, and rehearse
The mighty plan, oracular, in verse,
No bard, howe'er majestic, old or new,
Should claim my fixed attention more than you.
B. Not Brindley nor Bridgewater* would essay
To turn the course of Helicon that way;
Nor would the Nine consent the sacred tide
Should purl amidst the traffic of Cheapside,
Or tinkle in 'Change Alley, to amuse
The leathern ears of stockjobbers and Jews.
A. Vouchsafe, at least, to pitch the key of rhyme
To themes more pertinent, if less sublime.
When ministers and ministerial arts;
Patriots, who love good places at their hearts;
When admirals, extolled for standing still,
Or doing nothing with a deal of skill;
Generals, who will not conquer when they may,

* The great canal-maker of the last century and his ducal patron; men to whom the turning the course of a stream was a mere plaything of engineering art.

Firm friends to peace, to pleasure, and good pay;
When Freedom, wounded almost to despair,
Though Discontent alone can find out where;
When themes like these employ the poet's tongue,
I hear as mute as if a Syren sung.
Or tell me, if you can, what power maintains
A Briton's scorn of arbitrary chains?
That were a theme might animate the dead,
And move the lips of poets cast in lead.

B. The cause, though worth the search, may yet elude
Conjecture and remark, however shrewd.
They take perhaps a well directed aim,
Who seek it in his climate and his frame.
Liberal in all things else, yet Nature here
With stern severity deals out the year;
Winter invades the spring, and often pours
A chilling flood on summer's drooping flowers;
Unwelcome vapours quench autumnal beams,
Ungenial blasts attending curl the streams;
The peasants urge their harvest, ply the fork
With double toil, and shiver at their work;
Thus with a rigour, for his good designed,
She rears her favourite man of all mankind.
His form robust and of elastic tone,
Proportioned well, half muscle and half bone,
Supplies with warm activity and force,
A mind well lodged, and masculine of course.
Hence Liberty, sweet Liberty, inspires
And keeps alive his fierce but noble fires.
Patient of constitutional control,
He bears it with meek manliness of soul;
But if Authority grow wanton, woe

To him that treads upon his free-born toe;
One step beyond the boundary of the laws
Fires him at once in Freedom's glorious cause.
Thus proud Prerogative, not much revered,
Is seldom felt, though sometimes seen and heard;
And in his cage, like parrot fine and gay,
Is kept to strut, look big, and talk away.
Born in a climate softer far than ours,
Not formed like us, with such Herculean powers,
The Frenchman, easy, debonair, and brisk,
Give him his lass, his fiddle, and his frisk,
Is always happy, reign whoever may,
And laughs the sense of misery far away;
He drinks his simple beverage with a gust,
And, feasting on an onion and a crust;
We never feel the alacrity and joy
With which he shouts and carols, "*Vive le Roy!*"
Filled with as much true merriment and glee,
As if he heard his king say, "Slave, be free!"
Thus happiness depends, as Nature shows,
Less on exterior things than most suppose.
Vigilant over all that he has made,
Kind Providence attends with gracious aid;
Bids equity throughout his works prevail,
And weighs the nations in an even scale;
He can encourage slavery to a smile,
And fill with discontent a British isle.

A. Freeman and slave then, if the case be such,
Stand on a level, and you prove too much.
If all men indiscriminately share
His fostering power, and tutelary care,
As well be yoked by Despotism's hand,
As dwell at large in Britain's chartered land.

B. No. Freedom has a thousand charms to show.
That slaves, howe'er contented, never know.
The mind attains, beneath her happy reign,
The growth that Nature meant she should attain;
The varied fields of science, ever new,
Opening and wider opening on her view,
She ventures onward with a prosperous force,
While no base fear impedes her in her course;
Religion, richest favour of the skies,
Stands most revealed before the freeman's eyes;
No shades of superstition blot the day,
Liberty chases all that gloom away;
The soul, emancipated, unoppressed,
Free to prove all things, and hold fast the best,
Learns much, and to a thousand listening minds
Communicates, with joy, the good she finds;
Courage in arms, and ever prompt to show
His manly forehead to the fiercest foe;
Glorious in war, but for the sake of peace,
His spirits rising as his toils increase,
Guards well what Arts and Industry have won,
And Freedom claims him for her firstborn son.
Slaves fight for what were better cast away,
The chain that binds them, and a tyrant's sway;
But they that fight for freedom, undertake
The noblest cause mankind can have at stake;
Religion, virtue, truth, whate'er we call
A blessing, freedom is the pledge of all.
O Liberty! the prisoner's pleasing dream,
The poet's muse, his passion, and his theme;
Genius is thine, and thou art Fancy's nurse;
Lost without thee the ennobling powers of verse;
Heroic song from thy free touch acquires

Its clearest tone, the rapture it inspires:
Place me where Winter breathes his keenest air,
And I will sing, if Liberty be there;
And I will sing, at Liberty's dear feet,
In Afric's torrid clime, or India's fiercest heat.

A. Sing where you please, in such a cause I grant
An English poet's privilege to rant,
But is not Freedom, at least, is not ours,
Too apt to play the wanton with her powers,
Grow freakish, and, o'erleaping every mound,
Spread anarchy and terror all around?

B. Agreed. But would you sell or slay your horse
For bounding and curvetting in his course;
Or if, when ridden with a careless rein,
He break away, and seek the distant plain?
No. His high mettle, under good control,
Gives him Olympic speed, and shoots him to the goal.

Let Discipline employ her wholesome arts;
Let Magistrates alert perform their parts,
Not skulk, or put on a prudential mask,*
As if their duty were a desperate task;
Let active Laws apply the needful curb,
To guard the Peace that Riot would disturb;
And Liberty, preserved from wild excess,
Shall raise no feuds for armies to suppress.
When Tumult lately burst his prison door,
And set plebeian thousands in a roar;
When he usurped Authority's just place,

* The allusion here, as well as in a subsequent part of this present paragraph, is, of course, to the "No Popery" riots of 1780. The conduct of the magistrates on that occasion was the subject of universal censure.—See *Annual Register for* 1780, p. 264.

And dared to look his master in the face;
When the rude rabble's watchword was—"Destroy!"
And blazing London seemed a second Troy,
Liberty blushed, and hung her drooping head,
Beheld their progress with the deepest dread,
Blushed that effects like these she should produce,
Worse than the deeds of galley-slaves broke loose.
She loses in such storms her very name,
And fierce Licentiousness should bear the blame.
Incomparable gem! thy worth untold;
Cheap, though blood-bought, and thrown away when sold;
May no foes ravish thee, and no false friend
Betray thee, while professing to defend;
Prize it, ye ministers; ye monarchs, spare;
Ye patriots, guard it with a miser's care.

A. Patriots, alas! the few that have been found,
Where most they flourish, upon English ground,
The country's need have scantily supplied,
And the last left the scene when Chatham died.

B. Not so. The virtue still adorns our age,
Though the chief actor died upon the stage.*
In him, Demosthenes was heard again,
Liberty taught him her Athenian strain,
She clothed him with authority and awe,
Spoke from his lips, and in his looks gave law.
His speech, his form, his action, full of grace,

* Chatham's last speech was spoken in the House of Lords on the 7th of April, 1778. He swooned, or was seized with a fit, in the House, and died on the 11th of the following month. Painters and poets have united in confirming the popular opinion that his fatal seizure was, in point of fact, his death;—that he "died upon the stage."

And all his country beaming in his face,
He stood, as some inimitable hand
Would strive to make a Paul or Tully stand.
No sycophant or slave, that dared oppose
Her sacred cause, but trembled when he rose,
And every venal stickler for the yoke,
Felt himself crushed at the first word he spoke.
Such men are raised to station and command,
When Providence means mercy to a land.
He speaks, and they appear; to him they owe
Skill to direct, and strength to strike the blow,
To manage with address, to seize with power,
The crisis of a dark decisive hour.
So Gideon earned a victory not his own,
Subserviency his praise, and that alone.*
Poor England! thou art a devoted deer,
Beset with every ill but that of fear.
The nations hunt, all mark thee for a prey,
They swarm around thee, and thou stand'st at bay,
Undaunted still, though wearied and perplexed.
Once Chatham saved thee, but who saves thee next?
Alas! the tide of pleasure sweeps along
All that should be the boast of British song.
'Tis not the wreath that once adorned thy brow,
The prize of happier times, will serve thee now.
Our ancestry, a gallant Christian race,
Patterns of every virtue, every grace,
Confessed a God; they kneeled before they fought,
And praised him in the victories He wrought;
Now, from the dust of ancient days, bring forth
Their sober zeal, integrity, and worth;

* Judges vii. 9-22.

Courage, ungraced by these, affronts the skies,
Is but the fire without the sacrifice.
The stream that feeds the wellspring of the heart
Not more invigorates life's noblest part,
Than Virtue quickens, with a warmth divine,
The powers that Sin has brought to a decline.

A. The inestimable Estimate of Brown*
Rose like a paper-kite, and charmed the town;
But measures planned and executed well,
Shifted the wind that raised it, and it fell.
He trod the very selfsame ground you tread,
And Victory refuted all he said.

B. And yet his judgment was not framed amiss;
Its error, if it erred, was merely this—
He thought the dying hour already come,
And a complete recovery struck him dumb.

But that effeminacy, folly, lust,
Enervate and enfeeble, and needs must;
And that a nation shamefully debased,
Will be despised and trampled on at last,
Unless sweet Penitence her powers renew,
Is truth, if history itself be true.
There is a time, and Justice marks the date,
For long forbearing Clemency to wait;
That hour elapsed, the incurable revolt
Is punished, and down comes the thunderbolt.

* Few books were ever more successful on first publication than Dr. John Brown's "Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times," 8vo. Lond. 1757. Seven editions were published in little more than a year, and the works of controversy to which it gave rise were extremely numerous. The revival of public spirit which ensued, in 1758, threw the work into the shade, and now author and book are alike unknown, save to the students of our literary history.

If Mercy then put by the threatening blow,
Must she perform the same kind office now?
May she! and if offended Heaven be still
Accessible, and prayer prevail, she will.
'Tis not, however, insolence and noise,
The tempest of tumultuary joys,
Nor is it yet despondence and dismay,
Will win her visits or engage her stay;
Prayer only, and the penitential tear,
Can call her smiling down, and fix her here.
But when a country (one that I could name)
In prostitution sinks the sense of shame;
When infamous Venality, grown bold,
Writes on his bosom, "To be let or sold;"
When Perjury, that Heaven-defying vice,
Sells oaths by tale, and at the lowest price,
Stamps God's own name upon a lie just made,
To turn a penny in the way of trade;
When Avarice starves, and never hides his face,
Two or three millions of the human race,
And not a tongue inquires how, where, or when,
Though conscience will have twinges now and then;
When profanation of the sacred cause
In all its parts, times, ministry, and laws,
Bespeaks a land, once Christian, fallen and lost,
In all that wars against that title most;
What follows next, let cities of great name,
And regions long since desolate, proclaim.
Nineveh, Babylon, and ancient Rome,
Speak to the present times, and times to come;
They cry aloud in every careless ear,
"Stop, while ye may; suspend your mad career;
O learn, from our example and our fate,

Learn wisdom and repentance ere too late."
Not only Vice disposes and prepares
The mind that slumbers sweetly in her snares,
To stoop to Tyranny's usurped command,
And bend her polished neck beneath his hand,
(A dire effect, by one of Nature's laws
Unchangeably connected with its cause)
But Providence himself will intervene,
To throw his dark displeasure o'er the scene.
All are his instruments; each form of war,
What burns at home, or threatens from afar,
Nature in arms, her elements at strife,
The storms that overset the joys of life,
Are but his rods to scourge a guilty land,
And waste it at the bidding of his hand.
He gives the word, and Mutiny soon roars
In all her gates, and shakes her distant shores;
The standards of all nations are unfurled;
She has one foe, and that one foe, the world.
And if He doom that people with a frown,
And mark them with a seal of wrath pressed down,
Obduracy takes place; callous and tough,
The reprobated race grows judgment-proof:
Earth shakes beneath them, and Heaven roars above,
But nothing scares them from the course they love;
To the lascivious pipe and wanton song,
That charm down fear, they frolic it along,
With mad rapidity and unconcern,
Down to the gulf from which is no return.
They trust in navies, and their navies fail—
God's curse can cast away ten thousand sail!
They trust in armies, and their courage dies;

In wisdom, wealth, in fortune, and in lies;
But all they trust in withers, as it must,
When He commands in whom they place no trust.
Vengeance at last pours down upon their coast,
A long despised, but now victorious, host;
Tyranny sends the chain that must abridge
The noble sweep of all their privilege,
Gives Liberty the last, the mortal shock,
Slips the slave's collar on, and snaps the lock.
A. Such lofty strains embellish what you teach,
Mean you to prophesy, or but to preach?
B. I know the mind that feels indeed the fire
The Muse imparts, and can command the lyre,
Acts with a force, and kindles with a zeal,
Whate'er the theme, that others never feel;
If human woes her soft attention claim,
A tender sympathy pervades the frame,
She pours a sensibility divine
Along the nerve of every feeling line;
But if a deed not tamely to be borne
Fire indignation and a sense of scorn,
The strings are swept with such a power, so loud,
The storm of music shakes the astonished crowd.
So, when remote futurity is brought
Before the keen inquiry of her thought,
A terrible sagacity informs
The poet's heart; he looks to distant storms;
He hears the thunder ere the tempest lowers;
And armed with strength surpassing human powers,
Seizes events as yet unknown to man,
And darts his soul into the dawning plan.
Hence, in a Roman mouth, the graceful name
Of prophet and of poet was the same;

Hence British poets too the priesthood shared,
And every hallowed Druid was a bard.
But no prophetic fires to me belong;
I play with syllables, and sport in song.
A. At Westminster, where little poets strive
To set a distich upon six and five,
Where Discipline helps opening buds of sense,
And makes his pupils proud with silver pence,*
I was a poet too: but modern taste
Is so refined, and delicate, and chaste,
That verse, whatever fire the fancy warms,
Without a creamy smoothness has no charms.
Thus, all success depending on an ear,
And thinking I might purchase it too dear,
If sentiment were sacrificed to sound,
And truth cut short to make a period round,
I judged a man of sense could scarce do worse,
Than caper in the morris-dance of verse.
B. Thus reputation is a spur to wit,
And some wits flag through fear of losing it.
Give me the line that ploughs its stately course
Like a proud swan, conquering the stream by force;
That, like some cottage beauty, strikes the heart,
Quite unindebted to the tricks of art.

* Cowper alludes to these Westminster rewards in a letter to Unwin, printed in Southey's Cowper, V. 355. He there describes a day-dream, in which he fancied himself again a schoolboy, receiving a silver groat for his exercise, and having the pleasure of seeing it sent from form to form for the admiration of all who were able to understand it. Southey, in a note on this custom, remarks that his own first literary profits were thus obtained, and that like Cowper he remembered the pleasure with which he received them. "Opening buds of sense," continue to the present time to be helped on at Westminster with these gifts of silver pence.

When Labour and when Dullness, club in hand,
Like the two figures at St. Dunstan's* stand,
Beating alternately, in measured time,
The clockwork tintinnabulum of rhyme,
Exact and regular the sounds will be,
But such mere quarter-strokes are not for me.

From him who rears a poem lank and long,
To him who strains his all into a song,
Perhaps some bonny Caledonian air,
All birks and braes, though he was never there;
Or, having whelped a prologue with great pains,
Feels himself spent, and fumbles for his brains;
A prologue interdashed with many a stroke,
An art contrived to advertise a joke,
So that the jest is clearly to be seen,
Not in the words—but in the gap between;
Manner is all in all, whate'er is writ,
The substitute for genius, sense, and wit.

To dally much with subjects mean and low
Proves that the mind is weak, or makes it so.
Neglected talents rust into decay,
And every effort ends in push-pin play.
The man that means success, should soar above
A soldier's feather, or a lady's glove,
Else summoning the Muse to such a theme,
The fruit of all her labour is whipped cream;
As if an eagle flew aloft, and then—
Stooped from its highest pitch to pounce a wren;

* Since Cowper's time these celebrated figures have been sold from the parish which they long distinguished, and have found a refuge in a residence in the Regent's Park, which is called from that circumstance St. Dunstan's Villa. They continue to beat their quarter-strokes with their old regularity.

As if the poet, purposing to wed,
Should carve himself a wife in gingerbread.
  Ages elapsed ere HOMER's lamp appeared,
And ages ere the MANTUAN SWAN was heard;
To carry nature lengths unknown before,
To give a MILTON birth, asked ages more.
Thus genius rose and set at ordered times,
And shot a dayspring into distant climes;
Ennobling every region that he chose,
He sunk in Greece, in Italy he rose,
And, tedious years of Gothic darkness passed,
Emerged all splendour in our isle at last;
Thus lovely halcyons dive into the main,
Then show far off their shining plumes again.
  A. Is genius only found in epic lays?
Prove this, and forfeit all pretence to praise.
Make their heroic powers your own at once,
Or candidly confess yourself a dunce.
  B. These were the chief; each interval of night
Was graced with many an undulating light;
In less illustrious bards his beauty shone
A meteor, or a star; in these, the sun.
  The nightingale may claim the topmost bough,
While the poor grasshopper must chirp below;
Like him unnoticed, I, and such as I,
Spread little wings, and rather skip than fly;
Perched on the meagre produce of the land,
An ell or two of prospect we command,
But never peep beyond the thorny bound,
Or oaken fence that hems the paddock round.
  In Eden, ere yet innocence of heart
Had faded, poetry was not an art;
Language, above all teaching, or if taught,

Only by gratitude and glowing thought,
Elegant as simplicity, and warm
As ecstasy, unmanacled by form,
Not prompted, as in our degenerate days,
By low ambition and the thirst of praise,
Was natural as is the flowing stream,
And yet magnificent—a God the theme!
That theme on earth exhausted, though above
'Tis found as everlasting as his love.
Man lavished all his thoughts on human things,
The feats of heroes and the wrath of kings;
But still, while Virtue kindled his delight,
The song was moral, and so far was right.
'Twas thus till Luxury seduced the mind
To joys less innocent, as less refined;
Then Genius danced a Bacchanal; he crowned
The brimming goblet, seized the thyrsus, bound
His brows with ivy, rushed into the field
Of wild imagination, and there reeled,
The victim of his own lascivious fires,
And dizzy with delight, profaned the sacred wires:
Anacreon, Horace, played in Greece and Rome
This Bedlam part; and others nearer home.
When Cromwell fought for power, and while he reigned,
The proud Protector of the power he gained,
Religion harsh, intolerant, austere,
Parent of manners like herself severe,
Drew a rough copy of the Christian face,
Without the smile, the sweetness, or the grace;
The dark and sullen humour of the time
Judged every effort of the Muse a crime;
Verse in the finest mould of fancy cast,

Was lumber in an age so void of taste.
But when the Second Charles assumed the sway,
And arts revived beneath a softer day,
Then, like a bow long forced into a curve,
The mind, released from too constrained a nerve,
Flew to its first position, with a spring
That made the vaulted roofs of Pleasure ring.
His court, the dissolute and hateful school
Of Wantonness, where vice was taught by rule,
Swarmed with a scribbling herd, as deep inlaid
With brutal lust as ever Circe made.
From these a long succession, in the rage
Of rank obscenity, debauched their age,
Nor ceased till, ever anxious to redress
The abuses of her sacred charge, the press,
The Muse instructed a well nurtured train
Of abler votaries to cleanse the stain,
And claim the palm for purity of song,
That Lewdness had usurped and worn so long.
Then decent Pleasantry and sterling Sense,
That neither gave nor would endure offence,
Whipped out of sight, with satire just and keen,
The puppy pack that had defiled the scene.
In front of these came Addison. In him
Humour in holiday and sightly trim,
Sublimity and attic taste combined,
To polish, furnish, and delight the mind.
Then Pope, as harmony itself exact,
In verse well disciplined, complete, compact,
Gave Virtue and Morality a grace,
That, quite eclipsing Pleasure's painted face,
Levied a tax of wonder and applause,
E'en on the fools that trampled on their laws.

But he (his musical finesse was such,
So nice his ear, so delicate his touch)
Made poetry a mere mechanic art,
And every warbler has his tune by heart.
Nature imparting her satiric gift,
Her serious mirth, to ARBUTHNOT and SWIFT,
With droll sobriety they raised a smile
At folly's cost, themselves unmoved the while.
That constellation set, the world in vain
Must hope to look upon their like again.
A. Are we then left—B. Not wholly in the dark:
Wit now and then, struck smartly, shows a spark,
Sufficient to redeem the modern race
From total night and absolute disgrace.
While servile trick and imitative knack
Confine the million in the beaten track,
Perhaps some courser who disdains the road,
Snuffs up the wind and flings himself abroad.
Contemporaries all surpassed, see one,
Short his career, indeed, but ably run;
CHURCHILL, himself unconscious of his powers,
In penury consumed his idle hours,
And, like a scattered seed at random sown,
Was left to spring by vigour of his own.
Lifted at length, by dignity of thought
And dint of genius, to an affluent lot,
He laid his head in Luxury's soft lap,
And took, too often, there his easy nap.
If brighter beams than all he threw not forth,
'Twas negligence in him, not want of worth.
Surly and slovenly, and bold and coarse,
Too proud for art, and trusting in mere force,
Spendthrift alike of money and of wit,

Always at speed, and never drawing bit,
He struck the lyre in such a careless mood,
And so disdained the rules he understood,
The laurel seemed to wait on his command,
He snatched it rudely from the Muse's hand.
Nature exerting an unwearied power,
Forms, opens, and gives scent to every flower,
Spreads the fresh verdure of the field, and leads
The dancing Naiads through the dewy meads;
She fills profuse ten thousand little throats
With music, modulating all their notes,
And charms the woodland scenes, and wilds unknown,
With artless airs and concerts of her own;
But seldom (as if fearful of expense)
Vouchsafes to man a poet's just pretence—
Fervency, freedom, fluency of thought,
Harmony, strength, words exquisitely sought;
Fancy that from the bow that spans the sky,
Brings colours dipped in Heaven, that never die;
A soul exalted above Earth, a mind
Skilled in the characters that form mankind;
And as the Sun in rising beauty dressed,
Looks to the westward from the dappled east,
And marks whatever clouds may interpose,
Ere yet his race begins, its glorious close;
An eye like his to catch the distant goal,
Or ere the wheels of verse begin to roll,
Like his to shed illuminating rays
On every scene and subject it surveys:
Thus graced, the man asserts a poet's name,
And the world cheerfully admits the claim.
Pity Religion has so seldom found

A skilful guide into poetic ground!
The flowers would spring where'er she deigned to stray,
And every Muse attend her in her way.
Virtue indeed meets many a rhyming friend,
And many a compliment politely penned,
But unattired in that becoming vest
Religion weaves for her, and half undressed,
Stands in the desert shivering and forlorn,
A wintry figure, like a withered thorn.
The shelves are full, all other themes are sped,
Hackneyed and worn to the last flimsy thread;
Satire has long since done his best, and curst
And loathsome Ribaldry has done his worst,
Fancy has sported all her powers away
In tales, in trifles, and in children's play;
And 'tis the sad complaint, and almost true,
Whate'er we write, we bring forth nothing new.
'Twere new indeed to see a bard all fire,
Touched with a coal from Heaven, assume the lyre,
And tell the world, still kindling as he sung,
With more than mortal music on his tongue,
That He who died below, and reigns above,
Inspires the song, and that his name is Love.
For, after all, if merely to beguile,
By flowing numbers and a flowery style,
The tædium that the lazy rich endure,
Which now and then sweet Poetry may cure,
Or, if to see the name of idol* self,
Stamped on the well-bound quarto, grace the shelf,

* "Idol;" Eds. 1782, 1786, 1787, 1788, Southey, Bell. "Idle;" Ed. 1793, and subsequent editions, except Southey and Bell.

To float a bubble on the breath of Fame,
Prompt his endeavour, and engage his aim,
Debased to servile purposes of Pride,
How are the powers of genius misapplied!
The gift whose office is the Giver's praise,
To trace Him in his word, his works, his ways!
Then spread the rich discovery, and invite
Mankind to share in the divine delight;
Distorted from its use and just design,
To make the pitiful possessor shine,
To purchase, at the fool-frequented fair
Of Vanity, a wreath for self to wear,
Is profanation of the basest kind—
Proof of a trifling and a worthless mind.

A. Hail, Sternhold then, and, Hopkins, hail!

B. Amen.

If Flattery, Folly, Lust, employ the pen;
If Acrimony, Slander, and Abuse,
Give it a charge to blacken and traduce;
Though Butler's wit, Pope's numbers, Prior's ease,
With all that Fancy can invent to please,
Adorn the polished periods as they fall,
One madrigal of theirs is worth them all.

A. 'Twould thin the ranks of the poetic tribe,
To dash the pen through all that you proscribe.

B. No matter;—we could shift when they were not;
And should, no doubt, if they were all forgot.

THE PROGRESS OF ERROR.*

Si quid loquar audiendum.—Hor. Lib. iv. Od. 2.

SING, Muse, (if such a theme, so dark, so long,
May find a Muse to grace it with a song)
By what unseen and unsuspected arts
The serpent Error twines round human hearts;
Tell where she lurks, beneath what flowery shades,
That not a glimpse of genuine light pervades,
The poisonous, black, insinuating worm
Successfully conceals her loathsome form.
Take, if ye can, ye careless and supine,
Counsel and caution from a voice like mine!
Truths that the theorist could never reach,
And observation taught me, I would teach.
Not all whose eloquence the fancy fills,
Musical as the chime of tinkling rills,
Weak to perform, though mighty to pretend,
Can trace her mazy windings to their end,
Discern the fraud beneath the specious lure,
Prevent the danger, or prescribe the cure.
The clear harangue, and cold as it is clear,
Falls soporific on the listless ear;
Like quicksilver, the rhetoric they display

* First published in the same volume with the preceding poem, London, 1782, 8vo. It was written before Table Talk, and was sent to Newton complete in January, 1781. (Letter to Newton, 21 Jan. 1781.)

Shines as it runs, but grasped at, slips away.
Placed for his trial on this bustling stage,
From thoughtless youth to ruminating age,
Free in his will to choose or to refuse,
Man may improve the crisis, or abuse;
Else, on the fatalist's unrighteous plan,
Say to what bar amenable were man?
With naught in charge, he could betray no trust,
And if he fell, would fall because he must;
If Love reward him, or if Vengeance strike,
His recompense in both unjust alike.
Divine authority within his breast
Brings every thought, word, action, to the test;
Warns him or prompts, approves him or restrains,
As Reason, or as Passion, takes the reins.
Heaven from above, and Conscience from within,
Cry* in his startled ear, "Abstain from sin!"
The world around solicits his desire,
And kindles in his soul a treacherous fire,
While, all his purposes and steps to guard,
Peace follows Virtue as its sure reward,
And Pleasure brings as surely in her train,
Remorse, and Sorrow, and vindictive Pain.
Man thus endued with an elective voice,
Must be supplied with objects of his choice;
Where'er he turns, enjoyment and delight,
Or present, or in prospect, meet his sight;
Those† open on the spot their honeyed store,

* "Cry;" Eds. 1782, 1786, 1787, 1798, Southey. "Cries;" Ed. 1788, and subsequent editons, except 1798, until Southey's; also, Grimshawe, Dale, and Bell.

† "These;" Eds. 1782, 1786, 1787, 1788, Southey, Dale, and Bell. "Those;" Ed. 1793, and subsequent editions until Southey's; also Grimshawe.

These* call him loudly to pursuit of more.
His unexhausted mine, the sordid vice
Avarice shows, and virtue is the price;
Here various motives his ambition raise,
Power, Pomp, and Splendour, and the Thirst of Praise;
There Beauty woos him with expanded arms;
Even Bacchanalian Madness has its charms.
Nor these alone, whose pleasures less refined
Might well alarm the most unguarded mind,
Seek to supplant his inexperienced youth,
Or lead him devious from the path of truth;
Hourly allurements on his passions press,
Safe in themselves, but dangerous in the excess.
Hark! how it floats upon the dewy air!
Oh what a dying, dying close was there!
'Tis Harmony from yon sequestered bower,
Sweet Harmony that soothes the midnight hour;
Long ere the charioteer of day had run
His morning course, the enchantment was begun,
And he shall gild yon mountain's height again,
Ere yet the pleasing toil becomes a pain.
Is this the rugged path, the steep ascent,
That Virtue points to? Can a life thus spent
Lead to the bliss she promises the wise,
Detach the soul from earth, and speed her to the skies?
Ye devotees to your adored employ,
Enthusiasts drunk with an unreal joy,
Love makes the music of the blest above
Heaven's harmony is universal love,

* "Those;" Ed. 1782, and the others mentioned in the preceding note, in the instance of "these." "These;" Ed. 1793, and others mentioned in the preceding note, in the instance of "those."

And earthly sounds, though sweet and well combined,
And lenient as soft opiates to the mind,
Leave Vice and Folly unsubdued behind.
Grey dawn appears; the sportsman and his train
Speckle the bosom of the distant plain;
'Tis he, the Nimrod of the neighbouring lairs,
Save that his scent is less acute than theirs,
For persevering chase, and headlong leaps,
True beagle as the staunchest hound he keeps.
Charged with the folly of his life's mad scene,
He takes offence, and wonders what you mean;
The joy, the danger and the toil o'erpays;
'Tis exercise, and health, and length of days;
Again, impetuous to the field he flies,
Leaps every fence but one, there falls and dies;
Like a slain deer, the tumbrel brings him home,
Unmissed but by his dogs and by his groom.
Ye clergy, while your orbit is your place,
Lights of the world, and stars of human race;
But if eccentric ye forsake your sphere,
Prodigies* ominous, and viewed with fear;
The comet's baneful influence is a dream,
Yours real, and pernicious in the extreme.
What then!—are appetites and lusts laid down
With the same ease that† man puts on‡ his gown?
Will Avarice and Concupiscence give place,
Charmed by the sounds, "Your Reverence," or
"Your Grace?"

* "Prodigious;" Eds. 1782, 1786, 1787, Southey, Dale. "Prodigies;" Ed. 1788, and subsequent editions, except as stated above.

† "The;" Eds. 1782, 1786, Southey, Bell. "That;" Ed. 1787, and subsequent editions, except as stated above.

‡ It has been suggested that this should be "off," not "on," but all the editions have the latter word.

No. But his own engagement binds him fast,
Or, if it does not, brands him to the last,
What atheists call him, a designing knave,
A mere church-juggler, hypocrite, and slave.
Oh laugh or mourn with me, the rueful jest,
A cassocked huntsman, and a fiddling priest!
He from Italian songsters takes his cue;
Set Paul to music, he shall quote him too.
He takes the field, the master of the pack
Cries—"Well done, Saint!" and claps him on the back.
Is this the path of sanctity? Is this
To stand a way-mark in the road to bliss?
Himself a wanderer from the narrow way,
His silly sheep, what wonder if they stray?
Go, cast your orders at your Bishop's feet,
Send your dishonoured gown to Monmouth Street,*
The sacred function, in your hands is made—
Sad sacrilege! no function, but a trade!
Occiduus is a pastor of renown;
When he has prayed and preached the sabbath down,
With wire and catgut he concludes the day,
Quavering and semiquavering care away.
The full concerto swells upon your ear;
All elbows shake. Look in, and you would swear
The Babylonian tyrant with a nod
Had summoned them to serve his golden god;
So well that thought the employment seems to suit,
Psaltery and sackbut, dulcimer and flute.
Oh fie! 'Tis evangelical and pure;
Observe each face, how sober and demure!

* In St. Giles's, now named Dudley Street; long occupied by dealers in old clothes.

Ecstasy sets her stamp on every mien,
Chins fallen, and not an eye-ball to be seen.
Still I insist, though music heretofore
Has charmed me much (not even Occiduus more)
Love, joy, and peace make harmony more meet
For sabbath evenings, and perhaps as sweet.*
  Will not the sickliest sheep of every flock
Resort to this example as a rock,
There stand, and justify the foul abuse
Of sabbath hours with plausible excuse?
If apostolic gravity be free
To play the fool on Sundays, why not we?
If he the tinkling harpsichord regards
As inoffensive, what offence in cards?
Strike up the fiddles, let us all be gay!
Laymen have leave to dance, if parsons play.
  O Italy!—Thy sabbaths will be soon
Our sabbaths, closed with mummery and buffoon;
Preaching and pranks will share the motley scene,

* A copy of the first edition of this poem which belonged to the Mansels of Lathbury, contemporaries and neighbours of Cowper, is now in the possession of my friend Mr. Henry Gough, and has been lent to me for the use of the present edition. It contains various marginal notes in the hand-writing of Mr. Mansel Dawkin Mansel, and in them two clergymen, beneficed near Olney, are stated to have been the originals of the cassocked huntsman and the fiddling priest. It is undesirable to publish the names, especially as one of them appears to be a mistake. The pseudonyme Occiduus led the public to believe that one of the Wesleys was "the pastor of renown," whose Sunday evening concerts of instrumental music were condemned, and there is little doubt that the public were right, and that Cowper's neighbours were wrong. Cowper alludes to these concerts in a letter to Newton of the 9th of September, 1781, in terms which point pretty distinctly to a Wesley, probably to Charles.

Ours parcelled out, as thine have ever been,
God's worship and the mountebank between.
What says the prophet? Let that day be blest
With holiness and consecrated rest;
Pastime and business both, it should exclude,
And bar the door the moment they intrude;
Nobly distinguished above all the six,
By deeds in which the world must never mix.
Hear him again. He calls it a delight,
A day of luxury, observed aright,
When the glad soul is made Heaven's welcome guest,
Sits banqueting, and God provides the feast.
But triflers are engaged and cannot come;
Their answer to the call is—"Not at home."
O the dear pleasures of the velvet plain,
The painted tablets, dealt and dealt again!
Cards, with what rapture, and the polished die,
The yawning chasm of indolence supply!
Then to the dance, and make the sober moon
Witness of joys that shun the sight of noon.
Blame, cynic, if you can, quadrille or ball,
The snug, close party, or the splendid hall,
Where Night, down-stooping from her ebon throne,
Views constellations brighter than her own.
'Tis innocent, and harmless, and refined,
The balm of care, Elysium of the mind.
Innocent! Oh! if venerable Time
Slain at the foot of Pleasure be no crime,
Then, with his silver beard and magic wand,
Let Comus rise Archbishop of the land,
Let him your rubric and your feasts prescribe,
Grand Metropolitan of all the tribe.
Of manners rough, and coarse athletic cast,

The rank debauch suits Clodio's filthy taste.
Rufillus, exquisitely formed by rule,
Not of the moral, but the dancing school,
Wonders at Clodio's follies, in a tone
As tragical, as others at his own.
He cannot drink five bottles, bilk the score,
Then kill a constable, and drink five more,
But he can draw a pattern, make a tart,
And has the Ladies' Etiquette* by heart.
Go, fool; and, arm in arm with Clodio, plead
Your cause before a bar you little dread;
But know, the law that bids the drunkard die,
Is far too just to pass the trifler by.
Both baby-featured, and of infant size,
Viewed from a distance, and with heedless eyes,
Folly and Innocence are so alike,
The difference, though essential, fails to strike.
Yet Folly ever has a vacant stare,
A simpering countenance, and a trifling air;
But Innocence, sedate, serene, erect,
Delights us, by engaging our respect.
  Man, Nature's guest by invitation sweet,
Receives from her both appetite and treat;
But, if he play the glutton and exceed,
His benefactress blushes at the deed,
For Nature, nice, as liberal to dispense,
Made nothing but a brute, the slave of sense.
Daniel ate pulse by choice—example rare!
Heaven blessed the youth, and made him fresh and fair;
Gorgonius sits, abdominous and wan,

* Probably a popular volume in Cowper's day, but we have not found any book with that exact title.

Like a fat squab upon a Chinese fan;
He snuffs far off the anticipated joy,
Turtle and venison all his thoughts employ,
Prepares for meals as jockeys take a sweat,
O nauseous!—an emetic for a whet!
Will Providence o'erlook the wasted good?
Temperance were no virtue if He could.

That pleasures, therefore, or what such we call,
Are hurtful is a truth confessed by all;
And some that seem to threaten virtue less,
Still hurtful in the abuse, or by the excess.

Is man then only for his torment placed,
The centre of delights he may not taste?
Like fabled Tantalus, condemned to hear
The precious stream still purling in his ear,
Lip-deep in what he longs for, and yet curst
With prohibition and perpetual thirst?
No, wrangler,—destitute of shame and sense,
The precept that enjoins him abstinence,
Forbids him none but the licentious joy,
Whose fruit, though fair, tempts only to destroy.
Remorse, the fatal egg by Pleasure laid
In every bosom where her nest is made,
Hatched by the beams of truth, denies him rest,
And proves a raging scorpion in his breast.
No pleasure! Are domestic comforts dead?
Are all the nameless sweets of friendship fled?
Has time worn out, or fashion put to shame,
Good sense, good health, good conscience, and good fame?
All these belong to virtue, and all prove
That virtue has a title to your love.
Have you no touch of pity that the poor

Stand starved at your inhospitable door?
Or if yourself, too scantily supplied,
Need help, let honest industry provide.
Earn, if you want; if you abound, impart;
These both are pleasures to the feeling heart.
No pleasure! Has some sickly eastern waste
Sent us a wind to parch us at a blast?
Can British Paradise no scenes afford
To please her sated and indifferent lord?
Are sweet philosophy's enjoyments run
Quite to the lees? And has religion none?
Brutes capable would* tell you 'tis a lie,
And judge you from the kennel and the sty.
Delights like these, ye sensual and profane,
Ye are bid, begged, besought to entertain;
Called to these crystal streams, do ye turn off,
Obscene, to swill and swallow at a trough?
Envy the beast, then, on whom Heaven bestows
Your pleasures, with no curses in the close.
  Pleasure admitted in undue degree
Enslaves the will, nor leaves the judgment free.
'Tis not alone the grape's enticing juice
Unnerves the moral powers, and mars their use;
Ambition, avarice, and the lust of fame,
And woman, lovely woman, does the same.
The heart, surrendered to the ruling power
Of some ungoverned passion every hour,
Finds, by degrees, the truths that once bore sway,
And all their deep impressions,† wear away;

* "Should;" Eds. 1782, 1786, Southey. "Would;" Ed. 1787, and subsequent editions, except Southey's.

† "Impression;" Eds. 1782, 1786, 1787, 1788, Southey. "Impressions;" Ed. 1793, and subsequent editions, except Southey's.

So coin grows smooth, in traffic current passed,
Till Cæsar's image is effaced at last.
The breach, though small at first, soon opening wide,
In rushes Folly with a full moon tide,
Then welcome errors, of whatever size,
To justify it by a thousand lies.
As creeping ivy clings to wood or stone,
And hides the ruin that it feeds upon,
So sophistry cleaves close to and protects
Sin's rotten trunk, concealing its defects.
Mortals whose pleasures are their only care,
First wish to be imposed on, and then are.
And lest the fulsome artifice should fail,
Themselves will hide its coarseness with a veil.
Not more industrious are the just and true
To give to Virtue what is Virtue's due;
The praise of wisdom, comeliness, and worth,
And call her charms to public notice forth;
Than Vice's mean and disingenuous race
To hide the shocking features of her face;
Her form with dress and lotion they repair,
Then kiss their idol, and pronounce her fair.
The sacred implement I now employ
Might prove a mischief, or at best a toy;
A trifle if it move but to amuse;
But if to wrong the judgment and abuse,
Worse than a poniard in the basest hand,
It stabs at once the morals of a land.
Ye writers of what none with safety reads,
Footing it in the dance that Fancy leads,
Ye novelists, who mar what ye would mend,
Sniveling and driveling folly without end,

Whose corresponding misses fill the ream
With sentimental frippery, and dream,
Caught in a delicate, soft, silken net,
By some lewd earl, or rakehell baronet;
Ye pimps, who, under virtue's fair pretence,
Steal to the closet of young innocence,
And teach her, unexperienced yet and green,
To scribble as you scribbled,* at fifteen;
Who, kindling a combustion of desire,
With some cold moral think to quench the fire;
Though all your engineering proves in vain,
The dribbling stream ne'er puts it out again:
Oh that a verse had power, and could command
Far, far away, these flesh-flies of the land,
Who fasten without mercy on the fair,
And suck, and leave a craving maggot there!
Howe'er disguised the inflammatory tale,
And covered with a fine-spun, specious veil,
Such writers, and such readers, owe the gust
And relish of their pleasure all to lust.

But the Muse, eagle-pinioned, has in view
A quarry more important still than you;
Down, down the wind, she swims, and sails away,
Now stoops upon it, and now grasps the prey.

Petronius!† all the Muses weep for thee;
But every tear shall scald thy memory:
The Graces too, while Virtue at their shrine
Lay bleeding under that soft hand of thine,
Felt each a mortal stab in her own breast,

* "Scribble;" 1782, 1786, Southey. "Scribbled;" 1787, and subsequent editions, except Southey's.

† Chesterfield and his Letters to his Son are, of course, the Petronius and the Epistles alluded to.

Abhorred the sacrifice, and cursed the priest.
Thou polished and high-finished foe to truth,
Greybeard corrupter of our listening youth,
To purge and skim away the filth of vice,
That, so refined, it might the more entice,
Then pour it on the morals of thy son,
To taint his heart, was worthy of thine own!
Now, while the poison all high life pervades,
Write, if thou canst, one letter from the shades,
One, and one only, charged with deep regret,
That thy worst part, thy principles, live yet;
One sad epistle thence, may cure mankind
Of the plague spread by bundles left behind.

'Tis granted, and no plainer truth appears,
Our most important are our earliest years;
The Mind, impressible and soft, with ease
Imbibes and copies what she hears and sees,
And through life's labyrinth holds fast the clue
That Education gives her, false or true.
Plants raised with tenderness are seldom strong,
Man's coltish disposition asks the thong,
And without discipline the favourite child,
Like a neglected forester, runs wild.
But we, as if good qualities would grow
Spontaneous, take but little pains to sow;
We give some Latin, and a smatch of Greek,
Teach him to fence and figure twice a week,
And having done, we think, the best we can,
Praise his proficiency, and dub him man.

From school to Cam or Isis, and thence home,
And thence with all convenient speed to Rome,
With reverend tutor, clad in habit lay,
To tease for cash, and quarrel with all day;

With memorandum-book for every town,*
And every post, and where the chaise broke down;
His stock, a few French phrases got by heart,
With much to learn, but nothing to impart,
The youth, obedient to his sire's commands,
Sets off a wanderer into foreign lands;
Surprised at all they meet, the gosling pair,
With awkward gait, stretched neck, and silly stare,
Discover huge cathedrals built with stone,
And steeples towering high, much like our own,
But show peculiar light, by many a grin
At Popish practices observed within.

Ere long some bowing, smirking, smart Abbé
Remarks two loiterers that have lost their way,
And being always primed with *politesse*
For men of their appearance and address,
With much compassion undertakes the task
To tell them more than they have wit to ask;
Points to inscriptions wheresoe'er they tread,
Such as, when legible, were never read,
But being cankered now, and half worn out,
Craze antiquarian brains with endless doubt;
Some headless hero, or some Cæsar, shows—
Defective only in his Roman nose;
Exhibits elevations, drawings, plans,

* This was originally written:—

"With memorandum-book to minute down
The several posts, and where the chaise broke down."

After the sheet had been printed off, the circumstance of the word "down" being made to rhyme with itself first occurred to Cowper. He declared that the reviewers would say, "Here is not only 'down,' but 'down derry down' into the bargain." The leaf was accordingly cancelled, and the passage altered.

Models of Herculanean pots and pans,
And sells them medals, which, if neither rare
Nor ancient, will be so, preserved with care.
Strange the recital! from whatever cause
His great improvement and new lights he draws,
The squire, once bashful, is shamefaced no more,
But teems with powers he never felt before;
Whether increased momentum, and the force
With which from clime to clime he sped his course,
As axles sometimes kindle as they go,
Chafed him, and brought dull nature to a glow;
Or whether clearer skies and softer air,
That make Italian flowers so sweet and fair,
Freshening his lazy spirits as he ran,
Unfolded genially and spread the man,
Returning, he proclaims, by many a grace,
By shrugs and strange contortions of his face,
How much a dunce that has been sent to roam,
Excels a dunce that has been kept at home.
Accomplishments have taken Virtue's place,
And Wisdom falls before exterior grace;
We slight the precious kernel of the stone,
And toil to polish its rough coat alone.
A just deportment, manners graced with ease,
Elegant phrase, and figure formed to please,
Are qualities that seem to comprehend
Whatever parents, guardians, schools, intend;
Hence an unfurnished and a listless mind,
Though busy, trifling; empty, though refined;
Hence all that interferes, and dares to clash
With indolence and luxury, is trash;
While learning, once the man's exclusive pride,
Seems verging fast towards the female side.

Learning itself, received into a mind
By nature weak, or viciously inclined,
Serves but to lead philosophers astray,
Where children would with ease discern the way;
And of all arts sagacious dupes invent,
To cheat themselves and gain the world's assent,
The worst is—Scripture warped from its intent.
The carriage bowls along and all are pleased,
If Tom be sober, and the wheels well greased,
But if the rogue be gone a cup too far,
Left out his linchpin, or forgot his tar,
It suffers interruption and delay,
And meets with hindrance in the smoothest way.
When some hypothesis absurd and vain
Has filled with all its fumes a critic's brain,
The text that sorts not with his darling whim,
Though plain to others, is obscure to him.
The Will made subject to a lawless force,
All is irregular, and out of course,
And Judgment drunk, and bribed to lose his way,
Winks hard, and talks of darkness at noonday.
A critic on the sacred book should be
Candid and learned, dispassionate and free;
Free from the wayward bias bigots feel,
From Fancy's influence, and intemperate Zeal;
But above all (or let the wretch refrain,
Nor touch the page he cannot but profane),
Free from the domineering power of Lust;
A lewd interpreter is never just.
How shall I speak thee, or thy power address,

* The material with which wheels were greased in the days of Cowper. Upon a journey, a supply was ordinarily taken by coachmen.

Thou god of our idolatry, the Press?
By thee, Religion, Liberty, and Laws,
Exert their influence, and advance their cause:
By thee, worse plagues than Pharaoh's land befell,
Diffused, make Earth the vestibule of Hell;
Thou fountain at which drink the good and wise,
Thou ever bubbling spring of endless lies,
Like Eden's dread probationary tree,
Knowledge of good and evil is from thee.
No wild enthusiast ever yet could rest,
Till half mankind were like himself possessed.
Philosophers, who darken and put out
Eternal truth by everlasting doubt,
Church-quacks, with passions under no command,
Who fill the world with doctrines contraband,
Discoverers of they know not what, confined
Within no bounds—the blind that lead the blind,
To streams of popular opinion drawn,
Deposit in those shallows all their spawn.
The wriggling fry soon fill the creeks around,
Poisoning the waters where their swarms abound;
Scorned by the nobler tenants of the flood,
Minnows and gudgeons gorge the unwholesome food;
The propagated myriads spread so fast,
E'en Leeuwenhoek* himself would stand aghast,
Employed to calculate the enormous sum,
And own his crab-computing powers o'ercome.
Is this hyperbole? The world well known,

* A Dutch philosopher, who was among the first to bring to the notice of the world the wonders made known by the microscope. His long life (1632-1723) was passed in minute observations which tended towards the establishment of many great scientific truths. The *crustacea* and their *ova* were frequent subjects of his experiments.

Your sober thoughts will hardly find it one.
Fresh confidence the speculatist takes
From every hair-brained proselyte he makes,
And therefore prints, himself but half deceived,
Till others have the soothing tale believed.
Hence comment after comment, spun as fine
As bloated spiders draw the flimsy line;
Hence the same word, that bids our lusts obey,
Is misapplied to sanctify their sway.
If stubborn Greek refuse to be his friend,
Hebrew, or Syriac, shall be forced to bend;
If languages and copies all cry, "No!"
Somebody proved it centuries ago.
Like trout pursued, the critic in despair
Darts to the mud, and finds his safety there.
Women, whom custom has forbid to fly
The scholar's pitch (the scholar best knows why)
With all the simple and unlettered poor,
Admire his learning, and almost adore;
Whoever errs, the priest can ne'er be wrong,
With such fine words familiar to his tongue.
Ye ladies! (for, indifferent in your cause,
I should deserve to forfeit all applause)
Whatever shocks, or gives the least offence
To virtue, delicacy, truth, or sense,
(Try the criterion, 'tis a faithful guide),
Nor has, nor can have, Scripture on its side.
None but an author knows an author's cares,
Or Fancy's fondness for the child she bears.
Committed once into the public arms,
The baby seems to smile with added charms.
Like something precious ventured far from shore,
'Tis valued for the danger's sake the more.

He views it with complacency supreme,
Solicits kind attention to his dream,
And daily more enamoured of the cheat,
Kneels and asks Heaven to bless the dear deceit;
So one, whose story serves at least to show
Men loved their own productions long ago,
Wooed an unfeeling statue for his wife,
Nor rested till the Gods had given it life.
If some mere driveller suck the sugared fib,
One that still needs his leading string and bib,
And praise his genius, he is soon repaid
In praise applied to the same part—his head;
For 'tis a rule that holds for ever true,
Grant me discernment, and I grant it you.
Patient of contradiction as a child,
Affable, humble, diffident, and mild,
Such was Sir Isaac, and such Boyle and Locke,
Your blunderer is as sturdy as a rock.
The creature is so sure to kick and bite,
A muleteer's the man to set him right.
First Appetite enlists him Truth's sworn foe,
Then obstinate Self-will confirms him so.
Tell him he wanders, that his error leads
To fatal ills; that though the path he treads
Be flowery, and he see no cause of fear,
Death and the pains of Hell attend him there;
In vain: the slave of arrogance and pride,
He has no hearing on the prudent side.
His still-refuted quirks he still repeats,
New raised objections with new quibbles meets,
Till sinking in the quicksand he defends,
He dies disputing, and the contest ends;
But not the mischiefs: they still left behind,

Like thistle-seeds, are sown by every wind.
Thus men go wrong with an ingenious skill,
Bend the straight rule to their own crooked will,
And with a clear and shining lamp supplied,
First put it out, then take it for a guide.
Halting on crutches of unequal size,
One leg by truth supported, one by lies,
They sidle to the goal with awkward pace,
Secure of nothing, but to lose the race.
Faults in the life breed errors in the brain,
And these, reciprocally, those again.
The mind and conduct mutually imprint
And stamp their image in each other's mint;
Each sire and dam, of an infernal race,
Begetting and conceiving all that's base.
None sends his arrow to the mark in view,
Whose hand is feeble, or his aim untrue.
For though, ere yet the shaft is on the wing
Or when it first forsakes the elastic string,
It err but little from the intended line,
It falls at last, far wide of his design;
So he who* seeks a mansion in the sky,
Must watch his purpose with a stedfast eye,
That prize belongs to none but the sincere,
The least obliquity is fatal here.
With caution taste the sweet Circean cup,
He that sips often, at last drinks it up.
Habits are soon assumed, but when we strive
To strip them off, 'tis being flayed alive.
Called to the temple of impure delight,
He that abstains, and he alone, does right.

* "That;" Eds. 1782, 1786, Southey. "Who;" Ed. 1787, and subsequent editions, except Southey's.

If a wish wander that way, call it home,
He cannot long be safe whose wishes roam.
But if you pass the threshold, you are caught,
Die then, if power Almighty save you not.
There hardening by degrees, till double steeled,
Take leave of nature's God, and God revealed,
Then laugh at all you trembled at before,
And joining the freethinkers' brutal roar,
Swallow the two grand nostrums they dispense—
That Scripture lies, and blasphemy is sense.
If clemency revolted by abuse
Be damnable, then damned without excuse.
Some dream that they can silence, when they will,
The storm of passion, and say, "Peace, be still!"
But, "Thus far and no farther," when addressed
To the wild wave, or wilder human breast,
Implies authority that never can,
That never ought to be the lot of man.
But, Muse, forbear; long flights forbode a fall,
Strike on the deep-toned chord the sum of all.
Hear the just law—the judgment of the skies!
He that hates truth shall be the dupe of lies;
And he that will be cheated to the last,
Delusions strong as Hell shall bind him fast.
But if the wanderer his mistake discern,
Judge his own ways, and sigh for a return,
Bewildered once, must he bewail his loss
For ever and for ever? No—the Cross!
There, and there only, (though the deist rave,
And atheist, if Earth bear so base a slave)
There, and there only, is the power to save.
There no delusive hope invites despair,
No mockery meets you, no deception there;

The spells and charms that blinded you before,
All vanish there, and fascinate no more.
I am no preacher; let this hint suffice—
The Cross once seen is death to every vice;
Else He that hung there suffered all his pain,
Bled, groaned, and agonized, and died in vain.

TRUTH.*

Pensantur trutinâ.—Hor. Lib. II. Ep. 1.

MAN on the dubious waves of error tossed,
His ship half foundered, and his compass lost,
Sees, far as human optics may command,
A sleeping fog, and fancies it dry land;
Spreads all his canvass, every sinew plies,
Pants for it, aims at it, enters it, and dies.
Then farewell all self-satisfying schemes,
His well built systems, philosophic dreams;
Deceitful views of future bliss, farewell!
He reads his sentence at the flames of Hell.
Hard lot of man, to toil for the reward
Of virtue, and yet lose it! Wherefore hard?
He that would win the race, must guide his horse
Obedient to the customs of the course;
Else, though unequalled to the goal he flies,
A meaner than himself shall gain the prize.

* First published in the same volume as the preceding poems; London, 1782, 8vo. It was written in January, 1781. (Letter to Newton, dated 21st Jan. 1781.)

Grace leads the right way; if you choose the wrong,
Take it and perish; but restrain your tongue:
Charge not, with light sufficient and left free,
Your wilful suicide on God's decree.

Oh how unlike the complex works of man,
Heaven's easy, artless, unencumbered plan!
No meretricious graces to beguile,
No clustering ornaments to clog the pile,
From ostentation, as from weakness, free,
It stands, like the cerulean arch we see,
Majestic in its own simplicity.
Inscribed above the portal, from afar
Conspicuous as the brightness of a star,
Legible only by the light they give,
Stand the soul-quickening words—BELIEVE AND LIVE.
Too many, shocked at what should charm them most,
Despise the plain direction, and are lost.
"Heaven on such terms!" they cry with proud disdain,
"Incredible, impossible, and vain!"—
Rebel, because 'tis easy to obey,
And scorn, for its own sake, the gracious way.
These are the sober, in whose cooler brains
Some thought of immortality remains;
The rest too busy, or too gay, to wait
On the sad theme, their everlasting state,
Sport for a day, and perish in a night,
The foam upon the waters not so light.

Who judged the Pharisee? What odious cause
Exposed him to the vengeance of the laws?
Had he seduced a virgin, wronged a friend,
Or stabbed a man to serve some private end?

Was blasphemy his sin? Or did he stray
From the strict duties of the sacred day?
Sit long and late at the carousing board?
(Such were the sins with which he charged his Lord)
No—the man's morals were exact; what then?
'Twas his ambition to be seen of men;
His virtues were his pride; and that one vice
Made all his virtues gewgaws of no price;
He wore them as fine trappings for a show,
A praying, synagogue-frequenting beau.
The self-applauding bird, the peacock, see—
Mark what a sumptuous Pharisee is he!
Meridian sunbeams tempt him to unfold
His radiant glories, azure, green, and gold;
He treads as if, some solemn music near,
His measured step were governed by his ear,
And seems to say—"Ye meaner fowl, give place;
I am all splendour, dignity, and grace!"
Not so the pheasant on his charms presumes,
Though he too has a glory in his plumes.
He, Christianlike, retreats with modest mien
To the close copse, or far sequestered green,
And shines without desiring to be seen.
The plea of works, as arrogant and vain,
Heaven turns from with abhorrence and disdain;
Not more affronted by avowed neglect,
Than by the mere dissembler's feigned respect.
What is all righteousness that men devise,
What, but a sordid bargain for the skies?
But Christ as soon would abdicate his own,
As stoop from Heaven to sell the proud a throne.
His dwelling a recess in some rude rock,
Book, beads, and maple dish, his meagre stock,

In shirt of hair, and weeds of canvass dressed,
Girt with a bell-rope that the pope has blessed,
Adust with stripes told out for every crime,
And sore tormented long before his time,
His prayer preferred to saints that cannot aid,
His praise postponed, and never to be paid,
See the sage hermit, by mankind admired,
With all that bigotry adopts, inspired,
Wearing out life in his religious whim,
Till his religious whimsy wears out him.
His works, his abstinence, his zeal allowed,
You think him humble—God accounts him proud;
High in demand, though lowly in pretence,
Of all his conduct this the genuine sense—
My penitential stripes, my streaming blood,
Have purchased Heaven, and prove my title good.
Turn eastward now, and Fancy shall apply
To your weak sight her telescopic eye.
The Bramin kindles on his own bare head
The sacred fire, self-torturing his trade;
His voluntary pains, severe and long,
Would give a barbarous air to British song;
No grand inquisitor could worse invent,
Than he contrives to suffer well content.
Which is the saintlier worthy of the two?
"Past all dispute, yon anchorite," say you.
Your sentence and mine differ. What's a name?
I say the Bramin has the fairer claim.
If sufferings Scripture no where recommends,
Devised by self to answer selfish ends,
Give saintship, then all Europe must agree,
Ten starveling hermits suffer less than he.
The truth is (if the truth may suit your ear,

And prejudice have left a passage clear)
Pride has attained its most luxuriant growth,
And poisoned every virtue in them both.
Pride may be pampered while the flesh grows lean;
Humility may clothe an English Dean;
That grace was Cowper's*—his, confessed by all—
Though placed in golden Durham's second stall.
Not all the plenty of a Bishop's board,
His palace, and his lacqueys, and "My Lord,"
More nourish pride, that condescending vice,
Than abstinence, and beggary, and lice;
It thrives in misery, and abundant grows:
In misery fools upon themselves impose.

But why before us Protestants produce
An Indian mystic, or a French recluse,
Their sin is plain, but what have we to fear,
Reformed and well instructed? You shall hear.

Yon ancient prude,† whose withered features show
She might be young some forty years ago,
Her elbows pinioned close upon her hips,
Her head erect, her fan upon her lips,
Her eyebrows arched, her eyes both gone astray
To watch yon amorous couple in their play,
With bony and unkerchiefed neck defies
The rude inclemency of wintry skies,
And sails with lappet head and mincing airs,

* Spencer Cowper, second son of Lord Chancellor Cowper, and second cousin of the poet, Dean of Durham from 1746 to his death in 1774. "Golden Durham's second stall" is to be understood as alluding to the second place of dignity in that wealthy cathedral, not to that one of its prebendal stalls usually called "the golden," which was never held by Dean Stanhope.

† A prominent incident in Hogarth's picture of Morning is minutely described in this delineation of Miss Bridget.

Duly at clink of bell to morning prayers.
To thrift and parsimony much inclined,
She yet allows herself that boy behind;
The shivering urchin, bending as he goes,
With slipshod heels, and dewdrop at his nose,
His predecessor's coat advanced to wear,
Which future pages yet are doomed to share,
Carries her Bible tucked beneath his arm,
And hides his hands to keep his fingers warm.
  She, half an angel in her own account,
Doubts not hereafter with the saints to mount,
Though not a grace appears on strictest search,
But that she fasts, and, *item*, goes to church.
Conscious of age, she recollects her youth,
And tells, not always with an eye to truth,
Who spanned her waist, and who, where'er he came,
Scrawled upon glass Miss Bridget's lovely name;
Who stole her slipper, filled it with Tokay,
And drank the little bumper every day.
Of temper as envenomed as an asp,
Censorious, and her every word a wasp,
In faithful memory she records the crimes,
Or real, or fictitious, of the times,
Laughs at the reputations she has torn,
And holds them dangling at arm's length in scorn.
  Such are the fruits of sanctimonious pride,
Of malice fed while flesh is mortified:
Take, Madam, the reward of all your prayers,
Where hermits and where Bramins meet with theirs;
Your portion is with them; nay, never frown,
But, if you please, some fathoms lower down.
  Artist, attend! your brushes and your paint—
Produce them—take a chair—now draw a Saint.

Oh sorrowful and sad! the streaming tears
Channel her cheeks, a Niobe appears.
Is this a Saint? Throw tints and all away.
True Piety is cheerful as the day,
Will weep indeed, and heave a pitying groan,
For others' woes, but smiles upon her own.
What purpose has the King of Saints in view?
Why falls the Gospel like a gracious dew?
To call up Plenty from the teeming earth,
Or curse the desert with a tenfold dearth?
Is it that Adam's offspring may be saved
From servile fear, or be the more enslaved?
To loose the links that galled mankind before,
Or bind them faster on, and add still more?
The freeborn Christian has no chains to prove,
Or, if a chain, the golden one of love;
No Fear attends to quench his glowing fires,
What fear he feels his gratitude inspires.
Shall he, for such deliverance freely wrought,
Recompense ill? He trembles at the thought.
His master's interest and his own combined,
Prompt every movement of his heart and mind;
Thought, word, and deed, his liberty evince,
His freedom is the freedom of a prince.
Man's obligations infinite, of course
His life should prove that he perceives their force;
His utmost he can render is but small,
The principle and motive all in all.
You have two servants,—Tom, an arch, sly rogue,
From top to toe the Geta* now in vogue,

* There may be readers of Cowper whom it may be necessary to remind, that Geta is the name of "an arch, sly rogue" of a servant, who figures in two of the comedies of Terence.

Genteel in figure, easy in address,
Moves without noise, and swift as an express,
Reports a message with a pleasing grace,
Expert in all the duties of his place;
Say, on what hinge does his obedience move?
Has he a world of gratitude and love?
No, not a spark—'tis all mere sharper's play;
He likes your house, your housemaid, and your pay;
Reduce his wages, or get rid of her,
Tom quits you, with—"Your most obedient, Sir."
The dinner served, Charles takes his usual stand,
Watches your eye, anticipates command,
Sighs if perhaps your appetite should fail,
And if he but suspects a frown, turns pale;
Consults all day your interest and your ease,
Richly rewarded if he can but please,
And, proud to make his firm attachment known,
To save your life would nobly risk his own.
Now which stands highest in your serious thought?
"Charles, without doubt," say you—and so he ought;
One act, that from a thankful heart proceeds,
Excels ten thousand mercenary deeds.
Thus Heaven approves, as honest and sincere,
The work of generous love and filial fear,
But, with averted eyes, the omniscient Judge,
Scorns the base hireling, and the slavish drudge.
"Where dwell these matchless saints?" old Curio cries.
Even at your side, Sir, and before your eyes,
The favoured few—the enthusiasts you despise,
And, pleased at heart, because on holy ground
Sometimes a canting hypocrite is found,
Reproach a people with his single fall,

And cast his filthy raiment at them all.
Attend;—an apt similitude shall show,
Whence springs the conduct that offends you so.
See where it smokes along the sounding plain,
Blown all aslant, a driving, dashing rain,
Peal upon peal redoubling all around,
Shakes it again, and faster, to the ground;
Now flashing wide, now glancing as in play,
Swift beyond thought the lightnings dart away.
Ere yet it came, the traveller urged his steed,
And hurried, but with unsuccessful speed;
Now drenched throughout, and hopeless of his case,
He drops the rein, and leaves him to his pace.
Suppose, unlooked for in a scene so rude,
Long hid by interposing hill or wood,
Some mansion, neat and elegantly dressed,
By some kind, hospitable heart possessed,
Offer him warmth, security, and rest;
Think with what pleasure, safe and at his ease,
He hears the tempest howling in the trees;
What glowing thanks his lips and heart employ,
While danger passed is turned to present joy.
So fares it with the sinner, when he feels
A growing dread of vengeance at his heels;
His conscience, like a glassy lake before,
Lashed into foaming waves, begins to roar;
The law grown clamorous, though silent long,
Arraigns him, charges him with every wrong,
Asserts the rights of his offended Lord,
And death or restitution is the word;
The last impossible, he fears the first,
And having well deserved, expects the worst.
Then welcome refuge, and a peaceful home;

Oh for a shelter from the wrath to come!
Crush me, ye rocks; ye falling mountains, hide,
Or bury me in ocean's angry tide!
The scrutiny of those all-seeing eyes
I dare not—" And you need not," God replies;
" The remedy you want I freely give;
The book shall teach you; read, believe, and live!"
'Tis done—the raging storm is heard no more,
Mercy receives him on her peaceful shore,
And Justice, guardian of the dread command,
Drops the red vengeance from his willing hand.
A soul redeemed demands a life of praise,
Hence the complexion of his future days,
Hence a demeanour holy and unspecked,
And the world's hatred, as its sure effect.
Some lead a life unblameable and just,
Their own dear virtue their unshaken trust:
They never sin—or if (as all offend)
Some trivial slips their daily walk attend,
The poor are near at hand, the charge is small,
A slight gratuity atones for all.
For though the Pope has lost his interest here,
And pardons are not sold as once they were,
No Papist more desirous to compound,
Than some grave sinners upon English ground.
That plea refuted, other quirks they seek—
Mercy is infinite, and man is weak;
The future shall obliterate the past,
And heaven, no doubt, shall be their home at last.
Come, then—a still, small whisper in your ear—
He has no hope who* never had a fear;

* " That;" Eds. 1782, 1786, Southey. " Who;" Ed. 1787, and subsequent editions, except that of Southey.

And he that never doubted of his state,
He may perhaps—perhaps he may—too late.
The path to bliss abounds with many a snare;
Learning is one, and wit, however rare.
The Frenchman first in literary fame,
("Mention him if you please;—Voltaire?"—"The same.")
With spirit, genius, eloquence, supplied,
Lived long, wrote much, laughed heartily, and died;
The Scripture was his jest book, whence he drew
Bon mots to gall the Christian and the Jew;
An infidel in health;—"But what when sick?"
Oh, then, a text would touch him at the quick!
View him at Paris in his last career,
Surrounding throngs the demigod revere,
Exalted on his pedestal of pride,
And fumed with frankincense on every side,
He begs their flattery with his latest breath,
And smothered in't at last, is praised to death.
Yon cottager, who weaves at her own door,
Pillow and bobbins all her little store,
Content though mean, and cheerful if not gay,
Shuffling her threads about the livelong day,
Just earns a scanty pittance, and at night,
Lies down secure, her heart and pocket light;
She, for her humble sphere by nature fit,
Has little understanding, and no wit,
Receives no praise, but, though her lot be such,
(Toilsome and indigent), she renders much;
Just knows, and knows no more, her Bible true—
A truth the brilliant Frenchman never knew,
And in that charter reads, with sparkling eyes,
Her title to a treasure in the skies.

O happy peasant! O unhappy bard!
His the mere tinsel, hers the rich reward;
He, praised perhaps for ages yet to come,
She, never heard of half a mile from home;
He, lost in errors his vain heart prefers,
She, safe in the simplicity of hers.

Not many wise, rich, noble, or profound
In science, win one inch of heavenly ground;
And is it not a mortifying thought,
The poor should gain it, and the rich should not?
No;—the voluptuaries, who ne'er forget
One pleasure lost, lose heaven without regret;
Regret would rouse them, and give birth to prayer,
Prayer would add faith, and faith would fix them there.

Not that the Former of us all in this,
Or aught He does, is governed by caprice;
The supposition is replete with sin,
And bears the brand of blasphemy burnt in.
Not so; the silver trumpet's heavenly call
Sounds for the poor, but sounds alike for all;
Kings are invited, and would kings obey,
No slaves on earth more welcome were than they;
But royalty, nobility, and state,
Are such a dead, preponderating weight,
That endless bliss (how strange soe'er it seem)
In counterpoise, flies up and kicks the beam.
'Tis open, and ye cannot enter—why?
"Because ye will not," Conyers* would reply—

* Dr. Richard Conyers, rector of St. Paul's, Deptford, from 1775 to his death in 1786; a distinguished evangelical preacher. He was one of three clergymen whom Cowper and Mrs. Unwin solicited to find a fitting residence for them, in

And he says much that many may dispute
And cavil at with ease, but none refute.
O blessed effect of penury and want,
The seed sown there, how vigorous is the plant!
No soil like poverty for growth divine,
As leanest land supplies the richest wine.
Earth gives too little, giving only bread,
To nourish pride, or turn the weakest head;
To them, the sounding jargon of the schools
Seems what it is, a cap and bells for fools;
The light they walk by, kindled from above,
Shows them the shortest way to life and love;
They, strangers to the controversial field,
Where deists, always foiled, yet scorn to yield,
And never checked by what impedes the wise,
Believe, rush forward, and possess the prize.
Envy, ye great, the dull unlettered small,
Ye have much cause for envy—but not all;
We boast some rich ones whom the Gospel sways,
And one who* wears a coronet and prays;†
Like gleanings of an olive tree they show,
Here and there one upon the topmost bough.
How readily, upon the Gospel plan,
That question has its answer—What is man?
Sinful and weak, in every sense a wretch,
An instrument whose chords, upon the stretch,
And strained to the last screw that he can bear,
Yield only discord in his Maker's ear;

1767, on the death of Mr. Unwin. Dr. Conyers was then living at Helmsley in Yorkshire.

* "That;" Eds. 1782, 1786, Southey. "Who;" Ed. 1787 and subsequent editions, except Southey's.

† William, second Earl of Dartmouth, patron of the living of Olney, and a friend and correspondent of John Newton.

Once the blest residence of truth divine,
Glorious as Solyma's interior shrine,
Where, in his own oracular abode,
Dwelt visibly the light-creating God,
But made long since, like Babylon of old,
A den of mischiefs never to be told:
And she, once mistress of the realms around,
Now scattered wide, and no where to be found,
As soon shall rise and reascend the throne,
By native power and energy her own,
As Nature, at her own peculiar cost,
Restore to man the glories he has lost.
Go, bid the winter cease to chill the year,
Replace the wandering comet in his sphere,
Then boast (but wait for that unhoped-for hour)
The self-restoring arm of human power.
But what is man in his own proud esteem?
Hear him, himself the poet and the theme,
A monarch clothed with majesty and awe,
His mind his kingdom, and his will his law,
Grace in his mien, and glory in his eyes,
Supreme on earth, and worthy of the skies,
Strength in his heart, dominion in his nod,
And, thunderbolts excepted, quite a God!
So sings he, charmed with his own mind and form,
The song magnificent, the theme a worm!
Himself so much the source of his delight,
His Maker has no beauty in his sight.
See where he sits, contemplative and fixed,
Pleasure and wonder in his features mixed,
His passions tamed, and all at his control,
How perfect the composure of his soul!
Complacency has breathed a gentle gale

O'er all his thoughts, and swelled his easy sail:
His books well trimmed, and in the gayest style,
Like regimented* coxcombs rank and file,
Adorn his intellects as well as shelves,
And teach him notions splendid as themselves:
The Bible only stands neglected there,
Though that of all most worthy of his care,
And, like an infant, troublesome awake,
Is left to sleep for peace and quiet sake.
What shall the man deserve of humankind,
Whose happy skill and industry combined
Shall prove (what argument could never yet)
The Bible an imposture and a cheat?
The praises of the libertine professed,
The worst of men, and curses of the best.
Where should the living, weeping o'er his woes,
The dying, trembling at the awful close;
Where the betrayed, forsaken, and oppressed,
The thousands whom the world forbids to rest,
Where should they find (those comforts at an end
The Scripture yields) or hope to find, a friend?
Sorrow might muse herself to madness then,
And, seeking exile from the sight of men,
Bury herself in solitude profound,
Grow frantic with her pangs, and bite the ground.
Thus often Unbelief, grown sick of life,
Flies to the tempting pool, or felon knife;
The jury meet, the coroner is short,
And lunacy the verdict of the court.

* "Regimented;" Ed. 1782, subsequent editions down to 1806 (2), also 1821, and Southey. "Regimental;" Eds. 1808, 1810, 1812, 1817, 1825, together with Dale, Bell, and Grimshawe.

Reverse the sentence, let the truth be known,
Such lunacy is ignorance alone;
They knew not, what some bishops may not know,
That Scripture is the only cure of woe;
That field of promise, how it flings abroad
Its odour o'er the Christian's thorny road!
The soul reposing on assured relief,
Feels herself happy amidst all her grief,
Forgets her labour as she toils along,
Weeps tears of joy, and bursts into a song.
But the same word that, like the polished share,
Ploughs up the roots of a believer's care,
Kills too the flowery weeds, where'er they grow,
That bind the sinner's Bacchanalian brow.
O that unwelcome voice of heavenly love,
Sad messenger of mercy from above,
How does it grate upon his thankless ear,
Crippling his pleasures with the cramp of fear!
His will and judgment at continual strife,
That civil war embitters all his life;
In vain he points his powers against the skies,
In vain he closes or averts his eyes,
Truth will intrude—she bids him yet beware;
And shakes the sceptic in the scorner's chair.
Though various foes against the Truth combine,
Pride above all opposes her design;
Pride, of a growth superior to the rest,
The subtlest serpent with the loftiest crest,
Swells at the thought, and kindling into rage,
Would hiss the cherub Mercy from the stage.
"And is the soul indeed so lost,"—she cries,
"Fallen from her glory, and too weak to rise,
Torpid and dull beneath a frozen zone,

Has she no spark that may be deemed her own?
Grant her indebted to what zealots call
Grace undeserved, yet surely not for all;
Some beams of rectitude she yet displays,
Some love of virtue, and some power to praise;
Can lift herself above corporeal things,
And soaring on her own unborrowed wings,
Possess herself of all that's good or true,
Assert the skies, and vindicate her due.
Past indiscretion is a venial crime,
And if the youth, unmellowed yet by time,
Bore on his branch, luxuriant then and rude,
Fruits of a blighted size, austere and crude,
Maturer years shall happier stores produce,
And meliorate the well concocted juice.
Then, conscious of her meritorious zeal,
To Justice she may make her bold appeal,
And leave to Mercy, with a tranquil mind,
The worthless and unfruitful of mankind."

Hear then how Mercy, slighted and defied,
Retorts the affront against the crown of Pride.

"Perish the virtue, as it ought, abhorred,
And the fool with it, who* insults his Lord.
The atonement a Redeemer's love has wrought
Is not for you—the righteous need it not.
Seest thou yon harlot, wooing all she meets,
The worn-out nuisance of the public streets,
Herself from morn to night, from night to morn,
Her own abhorrence, and as much your scorn;
The gracious shower, unlimited and free,
Shall fall on her, when Heaven denies it thee.

* "That;" Eds. 1782, 1786, Southey. "Who;" Ed. 1787, and subsequent editions, except that of Southey.

Of all that Wisdom dictates this the drift,
That man is dead in sin, and life a gift."
" Is virtue then, unless of Christian growth,
Mere fallacy, or foolishness, or both?
Ten thousand sages lost in endless woe,
For ignorance of what they could not know?
That speech betrays at once a bigot's tongue,
Charge not a God with such outrageous wrong."
" Truly, not I! The partial light men have,
My creed persuades me, well employed, may save;
While he that scorns the noonday beam, perverse,
Shall find the blessing unimproved, a curse.
Let heathen worthies, whose exalted mind
Left sensuality and dross behind,
Possess for me their undisputed lot,
And take unenvied the reward they sought,
But still in virtue of a Saviour's plea,
Not blind by choice, but destined not to see.
Their fortitude and wisdom were a flame
Celestial, though they knew not whence it came,
Derived from the same source of light and grace,
That guides the Christian in his swifter race;
Their judge was Conscience, and her rule their law;
That rule, pursued with reverence and with awe,
Led them, however faltering, faint, and slow,
From what they knew, to what they wished to know.
But let not him that shares a brighter day
Traduce the splendour of a noontide ray,
Prefer the twilight of a darker time,
And deem his base stupidity no crime;
The wretch who* slights the bounty of the skies,

* "That;" Eds. 1782, 1786, and Southey. "Who;" Ed. 1787, and subsequent editions, except Southey's.

And sinks, while favoured with the means to rise,
Shall find them rated at their full amount,
The good he scorned, all carried to account."
Marshalling all his terrors as he came,
Thunder, and earthquake, and devouring flame,
From Sinai's top Jehovah gave the law,
Life for obedience, death for every flaw.
When the great Sovereign would his will express,
He gives a perfect rule—what can He less?
And guards it with a sanction as severe
As Vengeance can inflict, or sinners fear:
Else his own glorious rights He would disclaim,
And man might safely trifle with his name.
He bids him glow with unremitting love
To all on Earth, and to Himself above;
Condemns the injurious deed, the slanderous tongue,
The thought that meditates a brother's wrong;
Brings not alone the more conspicuous part,
His conduct, to the test, but tries his heart.
Hark! universal Nature shook and groaned;
'Twas the last trumpet—see the Judge enthroned!
Rouse all your courage at your utmost need,
Now summon every virtue, stand and plead.
What! silent? Is your boasting heard no more?
That self-renouncing wisdom, learned before,
Had shed immortal glories on your brow,
That all your virtues cannot purchase now.
All joy to the believer! He can speak—
Trembling yet happy, confident yet meek.
"Since the dear hour that brought me to thy foot,
And cut up all my follies by the root,
I never trusted in an arm but thine,
Nor hoped, but in thy righteousness divine;

My prayers and alms, imperfect and defiled,
Were but the feeble efforts of a child;
Howe'er performed, it was their brightest part,
That they proceeded from a grateful heart;
Cleansed in thine own all-purifying blood,
Forgive their evil, and accept their good;
I cast them at thy feet—my only plea
Is what it was, dependence upon Thee;
While struggling in the vale of tears below,
That never failed, nor shall it fail me now."
Angelic gratulations rend the skies,
Pride falls unpitied, never more to rise,
Humility is crowned, and Faith receives the prize.

EXPOSTULATION.*

Tantane, tam patiens, nullo certamine tolli
Dona sines?—VIRG. *Æn.* v. 390.

WHY weeps the Muse for England? What appears
In England's case to move the Muse to tears?
From side to side of her delightful isle,
Is she not clothed with a perpetual smile?
Can Nature add a charm, or Art confer
A new-found luxury, not seen in her?

* First published in the volume of poems, London, 1782, 8vo. March 1781 may be assigned as the date of its composition. (Letter of Cowper to Newton, 18 March, 1781.)

Where under Heaven is Pleasure more pursued,
Or where does cold Reflection less intrude?
Her fields, a rich expanse of wavy corn,
Poured out from Plenty's overflowing horn;
Ambrosial gardens, in which Art supplies
The fervour and the force of Indian skies;
Her peaceful shores, where busy Commerce waits
To pour his golden tide through all her gates,
Whom fiery suns, that scorch the russet spice
Of eastern groves, and oceans floored with ice,
Forbid in vain to push his daring way
To darker climes, or climes of brighter day;
Whom the winds waft where'er the billows roll,
From the world's girdle to the frozen pole;
The chariots bounding in her wheel-worn streets,
Her vaults below, where every vintage meets;
Her theatres, her revels, and her sports;
The scenes to which not youth alone resorts,
But age, in spite of weakness and of pain,
Still haunts, in hope to dream of youth again;
All speak her happy:—let the Muse look round
From East to West, no sorrow can be found,
Or only what in cottages confined,
Sighs unregarded to the passing wind.
Then wherefore weep for England? What appears
In England's case to move the Muse to tears?

The prophet* wept for Israel; wished his eyes
Were fountains fed with infinite supplies;
For Israel dealt in robbery and wrong;
There were the scorner's and the slanderer's tongue,
Oaths used as playthings or convenient tools,

* Jeremiah, ix. 1.

As Interest biased knaves, or Fashion fools;
Adultery, neighing at his neighbour's door;
Oppression, labouring hard to grind the poor;
The partial balance and deceitful weight;
The treacherous smile, a mask for secret hate;
Hypocrisy, formality in prayer,
And the dull service of the lip were there;
Her women, insolent and self-caressed,
By Vanity's unwearied finger dressed,
Forgot the blush that virgin fears impart
To modest cheeks, and borrowed one from Art;
Were just such trifles, without worth or use,
As silly pride and idleness produce;
Curled, scented, furbelowed, and flounced around,
With feet too delicate to touch the ground,
They stretched the neck, and rolled the wanton eye,
And sighed for every fool that fluttered by.

He saw his people slaves to every lust,
Lewd, avaricious, arrogant, unjust;
He heard the wheels of an avenging God
Groan heavily along the distant road;
Saw Babylon set wide her two-leaved brass*
To let the military deluge pass;
Jerusalem a prey, her glory soiled,
Her princes captive, and her treasures spoiled;
Wept till all Israel heard his bitter cry,
Stamped with his foot, and smote upon his thigh,
But wept, and stamped, and smote his thigh, in vain;
Pleasure is deaf when told of future pain,
And sounds prophetic are too rough to suit

* "At the end of each street a little gate is formed in the wall along the river side . . . and they are all made of brass." Herodotus, *trans. Cary*, p. 78. 8vo. Lond. 1850.

Ears long accustomed to the pleasing lute:
They scorned his inspiration, and his theme,
Pronounced him frantic, and his fears a dream,
With self-indulgence winged the fleeting hours,
Till the foe found them, and down fell the towers.
Long time Assyria bound them in her chain,
Till penitence had purged the public stain,
And Cyrus, with relenting pity moved,
Returned them happy to the land they loved;
There, proof against prosperity, awhile
They stood the test of her ensnaring smile,
And had the grace in scenes of peace to show,
The virtue they had learned in scenes of woe.
But man is frail, and can but ill sustain
A long immunity from grief and pain,
And after all the joys that Plenty leads,
With tiptoe-step Vice silently succeeds.
When He that ruled them with a shepherd's rod,
In form a man, in dignity a God,
Came, not expected in that humble guise,
To sift and search them with unerring eyes,
He found, concealed beneath a fair outside,
The filth of rottenness and worm of pride,
Their piety a system of deceit,
Scripture employed to sanctify the cheat,
The pharisee the dupe of his own art,
Self-idolized, and yet a knave at heart.
When nations are to perish in their sins,
'Tis in the church the leprosy begins:
The priest, whose office is, with zeal sincere,
To watch the fountain, and preserve it clear,
Carelessly nods and sleeps upon the brink,
While others poison what the flock must drink;

Or, waking at the call of lust alone,
Infuses lies and errors of his own:
His unsuspecting sheep believe it pure,
And, tainted by the very means of cure,
Catch from each other a contagious spot,
The foul forerunner of a general rot.
Then Truth is hushed, that Heresy may preach,
And all is trash that Reason cannot reach;
Then God's own image on the soul impressed
Becomes a mockery and a standing jest;
And Faith, the root whence only can arise
The graces of a life that wins the skies,
Loses at once all value and esteem,
Pronounced by greybeards a pernicious dream:
Then Ceremony leads her bigots forth,
Prepared to fight for shadows of no worth,
While truths on which eternal things depend,
Find not, or hardly find, a single friend;
As soldiers watch the signal of command,
They learn to bow, to kneel, to sit, to stand,
Happy to fill Religion's vacant place
With hollow form, and gesture, and grimace.
Such, when the Teacher of his church was there,
People and priest, the sons of Israel were;
Stiff in the letter, lax in the design
And import, of their oracles divine,
Their learning legendary, false, absurd,
And yet exalted above God's own word,
They drew a curse from an intended good,
Puffed up with gifts they never understood.
He judged them with as terrible a frown,
As if not Love, but Wrath, had brought Him down:
Yet He was gentle as soft summer airs,

Had grace for others' sins, but none for theirs;
Through all He spoke a noble plainness ran—
Rhetoric is artifice, the work of man,
And tricks and turns, that Fancy may devise,
Are far too mean for Him that rules the skies.
The astonished vulgar trembled, while He tore
The mask from faces never seen before;
He stripped the impostors in the noonday sun,
Showed that they followed all they seemed to shun;
Their prayers made public, their excesses kept
As private as the chambers where they slept;
The Temple and its holy rites profaned
By mummeries He that dwelt in it disdained;
Uplifted hands, that, at convenient times,
Could act extortion and the worst of crimes,
Washed with a neatness scrupulously nice,
And free from every taint but that of vice.
Judgment, however tardy, mends her pace
When Obstinacy once has conquered Grace.
They saw distemper healed, and life restored,
In answer to the fiat of his word,
Confessed the wonder, and with daring tongue,
Blasphemed the authority from which it sprung.
They knew, by sure prognostics seen on high,
The future tone and temper of the sky,
But, grave dissemblers! could not understand,
That Sin let loose speaks Punishment at hand.

Ask now of History's authentic page,
And call up evidence from every age;
Display with busy and laborious hand
The blessings of the most indebted land;
What nation will you find, whose annals prove
So rich an interest in Almighty love?

Where dwell they now? Where dwelt in ancient day,
A people planted, watered, blest as they?
Let Egypt's plagues, and Canaan's woes proclaim
The favours poured upon the Jewish name;
Their freedom purchased for them, at the cost
Of all their hard oppressors valued most;
Their title to a country not their own,
Made sure by prodigies till then unknown;
For them, the states they left made waste and void,
For them, the states to which they went destroyed;
A cloud, to measure out their march by day,
By night a fire, to cheer the gloomy way;
That moving signal summoning, when best,
Their host to move, and when it stayed, to rest.
For them, the rocks dissolved into a flood,
The dews condensed into angelic food,
Their very garments sacred, old yet new,
And Time forbid to touch them as he flew;
Streams swelled above the bank, enjoined to stand,
While they passed through to their appointed land;
Their leader armed with meekness, zeal, and love,
And graced with clear credentials from above;
Themselves secured beneath the Almighty wing;
Their God their captain,* lawgiver, and king;
Crowned with a thousand victories, and at last,
Lords of the conquered soil, there rooted fast,
In peace possessing what they won by war,
Their name far published, and revered as far;
Where will you find a race like theirs, endowed
With all that man e'er wished, or Heaven bestowed?
They, and they only, amongst all mankind,
Received the transcript of the Eternal Mind;

Vide Joshua, v. 14.—(C. 1782.)

Were trusted with his own engraven laws,
And constituted guardians of his cause;
Theirs were the prophets, theirs the priestly call,
And theirs, by birth, the Saviour of us all.
In vain the nations, that had seen them rise,
With fierce and envious yet admiring eyes,
Had sought to crush them, guarded as they were
By power divine, and skill that could not err.
Had they maintained allegiance firm and sure,
And kept the faith immaculate and pure,
Then the proud eagles of all-conquering Rome
Had found one city not to be o'ercome;
And the twelve standards of the tribes unfurled
Had bid defiance to the warring world.
But Grace abused brings forth the foulest deeds,
As richest soil the most luxuriant weeds.
Cured of the golden calves, their fathers' sin,
They set up self, that idol-god, within;
Viewed a deliverer with disdain and hate,
Who left them still a tributary state;
Seized fast his hand, held out to set them free
From a worse yoke, and nailed it to the tree:
There was the consummation and the crown,
The flower of Israel's infamy full blown;
Thence date their sad declension, and their fall,
Their woes, not yet repealed, thence date them all.
Thus fell the best instructed in her day,
And the most favoured land, look where we may.
Philosophy indeed on Grecian eyes
Had poured the day, and cleared the Roman skies;
In other climes perhaps creative Art,
With power surpassing theirs, performed her part,
Might give more life to marble, or might fill

The glowing tablets with a juster skill,
Might shine in fable, and grace idle themes
With all the embroidery of poetic dreams;
'Twas theirs alone to dive into the plan
That Truth and Mercy had revealed to man;
And while the world beside, that plan unknown,
Deified useless wood or senseless stone,
They breathed in faith their well directed prayers,
And the true God, the God of truth, was theirs.
Their glory faded, and their race dispersed,
The last of nations now, though once the first;
They warn and teach the proudest, would they learn,
"Keep wisdom, or meet vengeance in your turn!
If we escaped not, if Heaven spared not us,
Peeled, scattered, and exterminated thus;
If Vice received her retribution due,
When we were visited, what hope for you?
When God arises, with an awful frown,
To punish lust, or pluck presumption down;
When gifts perverted, or not duly prized,
Pleasure o'ervalued, and his grace despised,
Provoke the vengeance of his righteous hand,
To pour down wrath upon a thankless land,
He will be found impartially severe,
Too just to wink, or speak the guilty clear."
O Israel, of all nations most undone!
Thy diadem displaced, thy sceptre gone;
Thy temple, once thy glory, fallen and rased,
And thou a worshipper e'en where thou mayst;
Thy services, once holy without spot,
Mere shadows now, their ancient pomp forgot;
Thy Levites, once a consecrated host,
No longer Levites, and their lineage lost,

And thou thyself o'er every country sown,
With none on earth that thou canst call thine own;
Cry aloud, thou that sittest in the dust,
Cry to the proud, the cruel, and unjust,
Knock at the gates of nations, rouse their fears,
Say Wrath is coming, and the storm appears,
But raise the shrillest cry in British ears.

What ails thee, restless as the waves that roar
And fling their foam against thy chalky shore?
Mistress, at least while Providence shall please,
And trident-bearing queen of the wide seas,
Why, having kept good faith, and often shown
Friendship and truth to others, findest thou none?
Thou that hast set the persecuted free,
None interposes now to succour thee.
Countries indebted to thy power, that shine
With light derived from thee, would smother thine;
Thy very children watch for thy disgrace,
A lawless brood, and curse thee to thy face;
Thy rulers load thy credit, year by year,
With sums Peruvian mines could never clear,
As if, like arches built with skilful hand,
The more 'twere pressed the firmer it would stand.

The cry in all thy ships is still the same,
"Speed us away to battle and to fame!"
Thy mariners explore the wild expanse,
Impatient to descry the flags of France,
But, though they fight as thine have ever fought,
Return ashamed, without the wreaths they sought.
Thy senate is a scene of civil jar,
Chaos of contrarieties at war,
Where sharp and solid, phlegmatic and light,
Discordant atoms meet, ferment, and fight;

Where Obstinacy takes his sturdy stand,
To disconcert what Policy has planned;
Where Policy is busied, all night long,
In setting right what Faction has set wrong;
Where flails of oratory thresh the floor,
That yields them chaff and dust, and nothing more.
Thy racked inhabitants repine, complain,
Taxed till the brow of Labour sweats in vain;
War lays a burden on the reeling state,
And Peace does nothing to relieve the weight;
Successive loads succeeding broils impose,
And sighing millions prophesy the close.*
Is adverse Providence, when pondered well,
So dimly writ, or difficult to spell,
Thou canst not read, with readiness and ease,
Providence adverse in events like these?
Know then, that Heavenly Wisdom on this ball
Creates, gives birth to, guides, consummates all;
That, while laborious and quick-thoughted man,
Snuffs up the praise of what he seems to plan,
He first conceives, then perfects his design,
As a mere instrument in hands divine.
Blind to the working of that secret Power
That balances the wings of every hour,
The busy trifler dreams himself alone,
Frames many a purpose, and God works his own.
States thrive or wither, as moons wax and wane,
E'en as his will and his decrees ordain;
While Honour, Virtue, Piety, bear sway,
They flourish; and, as these decline, decay.

* Written at the disastrous close of the American war, when there was not only great loss of public spirit within England, but, also, a combination against her of the chief powers of Europe.

In just resentment of his injured laws,
He pours contempt on them, and on their cause;
Strikes the rough thread of error right athwart
The web of every scheme they have at heart;
Bids rottenness invade, and bring to dust,
The pillars of support in which they trust,
And do his errand of disgrace and shame,
On the chief strength and glory of the frame.
None ever yet impeded what He wrought,
None bars Him out from his most secret thought,
Darkness itself before his eye is light,
And Hell's close mischief naked in his sight.
Stand now and judge thyself.—Hast thou incurred
His anger who can waste thee with a word,
Who poises and proportions sea and land,
Weighing them in the hollow of his hand,
And in whose awful sight all nations seem
As grasshoppers, as dust, a drop, a dream?
Hast thou (a sacrilege his soul abhors)
Claimed all the glory of thy prosperous wars?
Proud of thy fleets and armies, stolen the gem
Of his just praise, to lavish it on them?
Hast thou not learned, what thou art often told,
A truth still sacred, and believed of old,
That no success attends on spears and swords
Unblest, and that the battle is the Lord's?
That Courage is his creature; and Dismay
The post that at his bidding speeds away,
Ghastly in feature, and his stammering tongue
With doleful rumour and sad presage hung,
To quell the valour of the stoutest heart,
And teach the combatant a woman's part?
That He bids thousands fly when none pursue,

Saves as He will, by many or by few,
And claims for ever, as his royal right,
The event and sure decision of the fight?
Hast thou, though suckled at fair Freedom's breast,
Exported slavery to the conquered East?
Pulled down the tyrants India served with dread,
And raised thyself, a greater, in their stead?
Gone thither armed and hungry, returned full,
Fed from the richest veins of the Mogul,
A despot big with power obtained by wealth,
And that obtained by rapine and by stealth?
With Asiatic vices stored thy mind,
But left their virtues and thine own behind,
And having trucked thy soul, brought home the fee,
To tempt the poor to sell himself to thee?
Hast thou, by statute, shoved from its design,
The Saviour's feast, his own blest bread and wine,
And made the symbols of atoning grace
An office key, a picklock to a place,
That infidels may prove their title good,
By an oath dipped in sacramental blood?
A blot that will be still a blot, in spite
Of all that grave apologists may write,
And though a Bishop* toil to cleanse the stain,
He wipes and scours the silver cup in vain.
And hast thou sworn on every slight pretence,
Till perjuries are common as bad pence,

* Bishop Warburton, and his Essay on the Alliance between Church and State, and the Necessity and Equity of a Test Law, are the prelate and the publication alluded to. The subject of the Sacramental Test, the blot here alluded to, is so rapidly becoming obsolete, that some editor of Cowper will ere long find it necessary to explain what was meant by that political application of the most solemn of religious services.

While thousands, careless of the damning sin,
Kiss the book's outside, who ne'er look within?*

A passage which originally followed in this place was cancelled before publication, and the succeeding paragraph substituted in its place. Mr. Gough's copy of the first edition, before alluded to, has the leaf as at first printed, without any notice of the cancellation; and Southey had access to a copy, perhaps the poet's presentation copy to Mr. Bull, which possessed both the cancelled and the substituted leaves. The objection which led to the cancellation of the passage arose in the mind of Cowper himself. Finding, upon consultation with his friend Newton, that they united in condemnation of the original passage, Cowper instantly suppressed it. It has been supposed that the withdrawal was a consequence of Cowper's having become acquainted with his Roman Catholic friends at Weston, but the cancellation took place in 1781, whilst Cowper's intimacy with the Throckmortons did not arise until 1784. See Letters of Cowper to Johnson, 27 Nov. 1781, and to Newton, 27 Nov. 1781, 14 Dec. 1781, and 10 May, 1784. The following is the suppressed passage as it stands in Mr. Gough's copy:—

" Hast thou admitted with a blind, fond trust,
The lie that burn'd thy father's bones to dust,
That first adjudg'd them heretics, then sent
Their souls to Heav'n, and curs'd them as they went?
The lie that Scripture strips of its disguise,
And execrates above all other lies,
The lie that claps a lock on mercy's plan,
And gives the key to yon infirm old man,
Who once insconc'd in apostolic chair
Is deified, and sits omniscient there;
The lie that knows no kindred, owns no friend
But him that makes its progress his chief end,
That having spilt much blood, makes that a boast,
And canonizes him that sheds the most?
Away with charity that sooths a lie,
And thrusts the truth with scorn and anger by;
Shame on the candour and the gracious smile
Bestow'd on them that light the martyrs pile,
While insolent disdain in frowns express'd
Attends the tenets that endur'd that test:

Hast thou, when Heaven has clothed thee with disgrace,
And long provoked, repaid thee to thy face,
(For thou hast known eclipses, and endured
Dimness and anguish, all thy beams obscured,
When Sin has shed dishonour on thy brow,
And never of a sabler hue than now)
Hast thou, with heart perverse and conscience seared,
Despising all rebuke, still persevered,
And having chosen evil, scorned the voice
That cried "Repent!"—and gloried in thy choice?
Thy fastings, when calamity at last
Suggests the expedient of a yearly fast,
What mean they? Canst thou dream there is a power
In lighter diet at a later hour,
To charm to sleep the threatening of the skies,
And hide past folly from all-seeing eyes?
The fast that wins deliverance, and suspends
The stroke that a vindictive God intends,
Is to renounce hypocrisy; to draw
Thy life upon the pattern of the law;
To war with pleasure, idolized before;
To vanquish lust, and wear its yoke no more.
All fasting else, whate'er be the pretence,
Is wooing mercy by renewed offence.
Hast thou within thee sin,* that in old time
Brought fire from Heaven, the sex-abusing crime,

Grant them the rights of men, and while they cease
To vex the peace of others, grant them peace,
But trusting bigots whose false zeal has made
Treach'ry their duty, thou art self-betray'd."

* "Sin;" Eds. 1782, 1787, and subsequent editions, except Southey's. "Sins;" Ed. 1786, and Southey.

Whose horrid perpetration stamps disgrace
Baboons are free from, upon human race?
Think on the fruitful and well watered spot,
That fed the flocks and herds of wealthy Lot,
Where Paradise seemed still vouchsafed on earth,
Burning and scorched into perpetual dearth,
Or, in his words who damned the base desire,
"Suffering the vengeance of eternal fire;"*
Then Nature, injured, scandalized, defiled,
Unveiled her blushing cheek, looked on, and smiled;
Beheld with joy the lovely scene defaced,
And praised the wrath that laid her beauties waste.
Far be the thought from any verse of mine,
And farther still the formed and fixed design,
To thrust the charge of deeds that I detest
Against an innocent, unconscious breast;
The man that dares traduce, because he can
With safety to himself, is not a man.
An individual is a sacred mark,
Not to be pierced in play, or in the dark,
But public censure speaks a public foe,
Unless a zeal for virtue guide the blow.
The priestly brotherhood, devout, sincere,
From mean self-interest and ambition clear,
Their hope in Heaven, servility their scorn,
Prompt to persuade, expostulate, and warn,
Their wisdom pure, and given them from above,
Their usefulness ensured by zeal and love,
As meek as the man Moses, and withal
As bold as, in Agrippa's presence, Paul,
Should fly the World's contaminating touch,

* Jude, 7.

Holy and unpolluted:—are thine such?
Except a few with Eli's spirit blest,
Hophni and Phineas may describe the rest.
Where shall a teacher look, in days like these,
For ears and hearts that he can hope to please?
"Look to the poor; the simple and the plain
Will hear perhaps thy salutary strain:
Humility is gentle, apt to learn,
Speak but the word, will listen and return."
Alas, not so! the poorest of the flock
Are proud, and set their faces as a rock;
Denied that earthly opulence they choose,
God's better gift they scoff at, and refuse.
"The rich, the produce of a nobler stem,
Are more intelligent at least,—try them."
Oh vain inquiry! they without remorse
Are altogether gone a devious course,
Where* beckoning Pleasure leads them, wildly stray,
Have burst the bands, and cast the yoke away.
Now borne upon the wings of Truth sublime,
Review thy dim original and prime.
This island, spot† of unreclaimed rude earth,
The cradle that received thee at thy birth,
Was rocked by many a rough Norwegian blast,
And Danish howlings scared thee as they passed;
For thou wast born amid the din of arms,
And sucked a breast that panted with alarms.

* "When," instead of "where," crept into Eds. 1808, 1810, 1812, 1817. The earlier and later editions are consistent in the right reading.

† "Island spot;" Eds. 1782, 1786, 1787, 1788. "Island, spot;" Eds. 1793, 1794, 1798, 1799, 1800, 1803, 1805, 1806, 1808, 1810, 1812, 1817, 1821, 1825, Grimshawe, Dale. "Island-spot;" Eds. Southey and Bell.

While yet thou wast a grovelling, puling chit,
Thy bones not fashioned, and thy joints not knit,
The Roman taught thy stubborn knee to bow,
Though twice a Cæsar could not bend thee now:
His victory was that of orient light,
When the Sun's shafts disperse the gloom of night.
Thy language at this distant moment shows
How much the country to the conqueror owes;
Expressive, energetic, and refined,
It sparkles with the gems he left behind.
He brought thy land a blessing when he came,
He found thee savage, and he left thee tame;
Taught thee to clothe thy pinked and painted hide,
And grace thy figure with a soldier's pride;
He sowed the seeds of order where he went,
Improved thee far beyond his own intent,
And while he ruled thee by the sword alone,
Made thee at last a warrior like his own.
Religion, if in heavenly truths attired,
Needs only to be seen to be admired;
But thine, as dark as witcheries of the night,
Was formed to harden hearts and shock the sight;
Thy Druids struck the well strung harps they bore,
With fingers deeply dyed in human gore;
And while the victim slowly bled to death,
Upon the rolling* chords rung out his dying breath.
Who brought the lamp that with awaking† beams
Dispelled thy gloom, and broke away thy dreams,
Tradition, now decrepid and worn out,

* "Tolling;" Eds. 1782, 1786, 1787, Southey, Bell. "Rolling;" Ed. 1788, and subsequent editions, except those before mentioned.

† "Awakening;" Eds. 1782, 1786, 1787, Southey. "Awaking;" Ed. 1788, and subsequent editions, except Southey's.

Babbler of ancient fables, leaves a doubt:
But still light reached thee; and those gods of thine,
Woden and Thor, each tottering in his shrine,
Fell broken and defaced at their* own door,
As Dagon in Philistia long before.
But Rome, with sorceries and magic wand,
Soon raised a cloud that darkened every land;
And thine was smothered in the stench and fog
Of Tiber's marshes and the papal bog.
Then priests with bulls, and briefs, and shaven crowns,
And griping fists, and unrelenting frowns,
Legates, and delegates, with powers from hell,
Though heavenly in pretension, fleeced thee well;
And to this hour, to keep it fresh in mind,
Some twigs of that old scourge are left behind.†
Thy soldiery, the Pope's well managed pack,
Were trained beneath his lash, and knew the smack,
And when he laid them on the scent of blood,
Would hunt a Saracen through fire and flood.
Lavish of life, to win an empty tomb,
That proved a mint of wealth, a mine to Rome,
They left their bones beneath unfriendly skies,
His worthless absolution all the prize.
Thou wast the veriest slave, in days of yore,
That ever dragged a chain, or tugged an oar;
Thy monarchs arbitrary, fierce, unjust,
Themselves the slaves of bigotry or lust,
Disdained thy counsels, only in distress,
Found thee a goodly sponge for Power to press.

* "His;" Ed. 1782, and subsequent editions, except 1793, 1794, 1798, 1799, 1800, and Grimshawe.

† Which may be found at Doctors' Commons.—(C. 1782.)

Thy chiefs, the lords of many a petty fee,
Provoked and harassed, in return plagued thee;
Called thee away from peaceable employ,
Domestic happiness and rural joy,
To waste thy life in arms, or lay it down
In causeless feuds and bickerings of their own.
Thy parliaments adored, on bended knees,
The sovereignty they were convened to please;
Whate'er was asked, too timid to resist,
Complied with, and were graciously dismissed,
And if some Spartan soul a doubt expressed,
And blushing at the tameness of the rest,
Dared to suppose the subject had a choice,
He was a traitor by the general voice.
O slave! with powers thou didst not dare exert,
Verse cannot stoop so low as thy desert;
It shakes the sides of splenetic Disdain,
Thou self-entitled ruler of the main,
To trace thee to the date when yon fair sea,
That clips thy shores, had no such charms for thee;
When other nations flew from coast to coast,
And thou hadst neither fleet nor flag to boast.
Kneel now, and lay thy forehead in the dust;
Blush, if thou canst; not petrified, thou must:
Act but an honest and a faithful part;
Compare what then thou wast, with what thou art;
And God's disposing providence confessed,
Obduracy itself must yield the rest—
Then thou art bound to serve him, and to prove,
Hour after hour, thy gratitude and love.

Has he not hid thee, and thy favoured land,
For ages safe beneath his sheltering hand,
Given thee his blessing on the clearest proof,

Bid nations leagued against thee stand aloof,
And charged Hostility and Hate to roar
Where else they would, but not upon thy shore?
His power secured thee, when presumptuous Spain
Baptized her fleet Invincible in vain;
Her gloomy monarch, doubtful, and resigned
To every pang that racks an anxious mind,
Asked of the waves that broke upon his coast,
"What tidings?" and the surge replied—"All lost!"
And when the Stuart, leaning on the Scot,
Then too much feared, and now too much forgot,
Pierced to the very centre of the realm,*
And hoped to seize his abdicated helm,
'Twas but to prove how quickly, with a frown,
He that had raised thee, could have plucked thee down.
Peculiar is the grace by thee possessed,
Thy foes implacable, thy land at rest;
Thy thunders travel over earth and seas,
And all at home is pleasure, wealth, and ease.
'Tis thus, extending his tempestuous arm,
Thy Maker fills the nations with alarm,
While his own heaven surveys the troubled scene,
And feels no change, unshaken and serene.
Freedom, in other lands scarce known to shine,
Pours out a flood of splendour upon thine;
Thou hast as bright an interest in her rays,
As ever Roman had in Rome's best days.
True freedom is where no restraint is known
That Scripture, Justice, and Good Sense disown;
Where only Vice and Injury are tied,

* The march of Prince Charles to Derby, in 1745, is of course alluded to.

And all from shore to shore is free beside.
Such freedom is;—and Windsor's hoary towers
Stood trembling at the boldness of thy powers,
That won a nymph on that immortal plain,
Like her the fabled Phœbus wooed in vain:
He found the laurel only—happier you,
The unfading laurel, and the virgin too!*
Now think, if Pleasure have a thought to spare,
If God himself be not beneath her care,
If Business, constant as the wheels of time,
Can pause one hour to read a serious rhyme,
If the new mail thy merchants now receive,
Or expectation of the next, give leave,
Oh think, if chargeable with deep arrears
For such indulgence gilding all thy years,
How much, though long neglected, shining yet,
The beams of heavenly truth have swelled the debt!
When persecuting zeal made royal sport
With tortured innocence in Mary's court,
And Bonner, blithe as shepherd at a wake,
Enjoyed the show, and danced about the stake;
The Sacred Book, its value understood,
Received the seal of martyrdom in blood.
Those holy men, so full of truth and grace,
Seem to reflection of a different race,
Meek, modest, venerable, wise, sincere,
In such a cause they could not dare to fear;
They could not purchase earth with such a prize,
Nor† spare a life too short to reach the skies.

* Alluding to the grant of Magna Charta, which was extorted from King John by the barons, at Runnymede near Windsor.—(C.)

† "Nor;" Eds. 1782, 1786, 1787, 1788, Southey, Dale. "Or;" Eds. 1793, 1794, 1798, and other editions up to 1825, with Grimshawe and Bell.

From them to thee, conveyed along the tide,
Their streaming hearts poured freely when they died;
Those truths, which neither use nor years impair,
Invite thee, woo thee, to the bliss they share.
What dotage will not Vanity maintain?
What web too weak to catch a modern brain?
The moles and bats in full assembly find,
On special search, the keen-eyed eagle blind.
And did they dream, and art thou wiser now?
Prove it;—if better, I submit and bow.
Wisdom and Goodness are twin-born, one heart
Must hold both sisters, never seen apart.

So then;—as darkness overspread the deep,
Ere Nature rose from her eternal sleep,
And this delightful earth, and that fair sky,
Leaped out of nothing, called by the Most High;
By such a change, thy darkness is made light,
Thy chaos order, and thy weakness might;
And He, whose power mere nullity obeys,
Who found thee nothing, formed thee for his praise.
To praise him is to serve him, and fulfil,
Doing and suffering, his unquestioned will;
'Tis to believe what men inspired of old,
Faithful, and faithfully informed, unfold;
Candid and just, with no false aim in view,
To take for truth what cannot but be true,
To learn in God's own school the Christian part,
And bind the task assigned thee to thine heart;
Happy the man there seeking and there found,
Happy the nation where such men abound!

How shall a verse impress thee? By what name
Shall I abjure thee not to court thy shame?
By theirs whose bright example, unimpeached,

Directs thee to that eminence they reached,
Heroes and worthies of days past, thy sires?
Or his, who touched their hearts with hallowed fires?
Their names, alas! in vain reproach an age,
Whom all the vanities they scorned engage;
And his that seraphs tremble* at, is hung
Disgracefully on every trifler's tongue,
Or serves the champion in forensic war,
To flourish and parade with at the bar.
Pleasure herself perhaps suggests a plea,
If Interest move thee, to persuade e'en thee;
By every charm that smiles upon her face,
By joys possessed, and joys still held in chase,
If dear society be worth a thought,
And if the feast of freedom cloy thee not,
Reflect that these, and all that seems thine own,
Held by the tenure of his will alone,
Like angels in the service of their Lord,
Remain with thee, or leave thee at his word;
That gratitude and temperance in our use
Of what He gives, unsparing and profuse,
Secure the favour, and enhance the joy,
That thankless waste and wild abuse destroy.
But above all reflect, how cheap soe'er
Those rights that millions envy thee appear,
And though resolved to risk them, and swim down
The tide of pleasure, heedless of his frown,
That blessings truly sacred, and when given,
Marked with the signature and stamp of Heaven,
The word of prophecy, those truths divine,
Which make that Heaven, if thou desire it, thine,
(Awful alternative! believed, beloved,

* Eds. 1821, 1825, and Southey have "trembled."

Thy glory, and thy shame if unimproved)
Are never long vouchsafed, if pushed aside
With cold disgust, or philosophic pride;
And that, judicially withdrawn, disgrace,
Error, and darkness occupy their place.
A world is up in arms, and thou, a spot
Not quickly found, if negligently sought,
Thy soul as ample as thy bounds are small,
Endurest the brunt, and darest defy them all;
And wilt thou join to this bold enterprise
A bolder still, a contest with the skies?
Remember, if He guard thee and secure,
Whoe'er assails thee, thy success is sure;
But if He leave thee, though the skill and power
Of nations, sworn to spoil thee and devour,
Were all collected in thy single arm,
And thou couldst laugh away the fear of harm,
That strength would fail, opposed against the push
And feeble onset of a pigmy rush.
Say not (and if the thought of such defence
Should spring within thy bosom, drive it thence)
What nation amongst all my foes is free,
From crimes as base as any charged on me?
Their measure filled, they too shall pay the debt,
Which God, though long forborn, will not forget.
But know, that Wrath Divine, when most severe,
Makes Justice still the guide of his career,
And will not punish, in one mingled crowd,
Them without light, and thee without a cloud.
Muse, hang this harp upon yon aged beech,
Still murmuring with the solemn truths I teach;
And while, at intervals, a cold blast sings
Through the dry leaves, and pants upon the strings,

My soul shall sigh in secret, and lament
A nation scourged, yet tardy to repent.
I know the warning song is sung in vain,
That few will hear, and fewer heed the strain,
But if a sweeter voice, and one designed
A blessing to my country and mankind,
Reclaim the wandering thousands, and bring home
A flock so scattered, and so wont to roam,
Then place it once again between my knees,
The sound of truth will then be sure to please,
And truth alone, where'er my life be cast,
In scenes of plenty, or the pining waste,
Shall be my chosen theme, my glory to the last.

HOPE.*

doceas iter, et sacra ostia pandas.
VIRG. *Æn.* vi. 109.

ASK what is human life—the sage replies,
With disappointment lowering in his eyes,
A painful passage o'er a restless flood,
A vain pursuit of fugitive, false good,
A scene of fancied bliss and heart-felt care,
Closing at last in darkness and despair.
The poor, inured to drudgery and distress,
Act without aim, think little, and feel less,
And no where, but in feigned Arcadian scenes,

* First published in the volume of Poems, London, 1782, 8vo. It was written in May and June, 1781. (See Letter to Rev. W. Unwin, 24 June, 1781.)

Taste happiness, or know what pleasure means.
Riches are passed away from hand to hand,
As fortune, vice, or folly may command;
As in a dance the pair that take the lead
Turn downward, and the lowest pair succeed,
So shifting and so various is the plan
By which Heaven rules the mixed affairs of man;
Vicissitude wheels round the motley crowd,
The rich grow poor, the poor become purse-proud;
Business is labour, and man's weakness such,
Pleasure is labour too, and tires as much;
The very sense of it foregoes its use,
By repetition palled, by age obtuse.
Youth lost in dissipation, we deplore,
Through life's sad remnant, what no sighs restore;
Our years, a fruitless race without a prize,
Too many, yet too few to make us wise.
Dangling his cane about, and taking snuff,
Lothario cries, "What philosophic stuff!
O querulous and weak!—whose useless brain
Once thought of nothing, and now thinks in vain;
Whose eye reverted weeps o'er all the past,
Whose prospect shows thee a disheartening waste;
Would age in thee resign his wintry reign,
And youth invigorate that frame again,
Renewed desire would grace with other speech
Joys always prized, when placed within our reach.
"For lift thy palsied head, shake off the gloom
That overhangs the borders of thy tomb,
See Nature gay as when she first began,
With smiles alluring her admirer, man;
She spreads the morning over eastern hills,
Earth glitters with the drops the night distils,

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The sun, obedient, at her call appears,
To fling his glories o'er the robe she wears,
Banks clothed with flowers, groves filled with sprightly sounds,
The yellow tilth, green meads, rocks, rising grounds,
Streams edged with osiers, fattening every field
Where'er they flow, now seen and now concealed;
From the blue rim, where skies and mountains meet,
Down to the very turf beneath thy feet,
Ten thousand charms, that only fools despise,
Or pride can look at with indifferent eyes,
All speak one language, all with one sweet voice
Cry to her universal realm, 'Rejoice!'
Man feels the spur of passions and desires,
And she gives largely more than he requires;
Not that his hours devoted all to Care,
Hollow-eyed Abstinence, and lean Despair,
The wretch may pine, while to his smell, taste, sight,
She holds a Paradise of rich delight,
But gently to rebuke his awkward fear,
To prove that what she gives she gives sincere,
To banish hesitation, and proclaim
His happiness, her dear, her only aim.
'Tis grave Philosophy's absurdest dream,
That Heaven's intentions are not what they seem,
That only shadows are dispensed below,
And earth has no reality but woe."

Thus things terrestrial wear a different hue,
As youth or age persuades, and neither true;
So Flora's wreath through coloured crystal seen,
The rose or lily appears blue or green,
But still the imputed tints are those alone
The medium represents, and not their own.

To rise at noon, sit slipshod and undressed,
To read the news, or fiddle, as seems best,
Till half the world comes rattling at his door,
To fill the dull vacuity till four;
And just when evening turns the blue vault grey,
To spend two hours in dressing for the day;
To make the sun a bauble without use,
Save for the fruits his heavenly beams produce,
Quite to forget, or deem it worth no thought,
Who bids him shine, or if he shine or not;
Through mere necessity to close his eyes
Just when the larks, and when the shepherds, rise;
Is such a life, so tediously the same,
So void of all utility or aim,
That poor Jonquil, with almost every breath,
Sighs for his exit, vulgarly called death;
For he, with all his follies, has a mind,
Not yet so blank, or fashionably blind,
But now and then perhaps a feeble ray
Of distant wisdom shoots across his way,
By which he reads, that life without a plan,
As useless as the moment it began,
Serves merely as a soil for discontent
To thrive in; an incumbrance ere half spent.
O weariness beyond what asses feel,
That tread the circuit of the cistern wheel!
A dull rotation, never at a stay,
Yesterday's face twin image of to-day,
While conversation, an exhausted stock,
Grows drowsy as the clicking of a clock.
" No need," he cries, " of gravity, stuffed out
With academic dignity devout,
To read wise lectures, vanity the text;

Proclaim the remedy, ye learned, next;
For truth self-evident, with pomp impressed,
Is vanity surpassing all the rest."
That remedy, not hid in deeps profound,
Yet seldom sought where only to be found,
While Passion turns aside from its due scope
The inquirer's aim, that remedy, is HOPE.
Life is his gift, from whom whate'er life needs,
With* every good and perfect gift, proceeds;
Bestowed on man, like all that we partake,
Royally, freely, for his bounty'† sake;
Transient indeed, as is the fleeting hour,
And yet the seed of an immortal flower,
Designed, in honour of his endless love,
To fill with fragrance his abode above;
No trifle, howsoever short it seem,
And, howsoever shadowy, no dream;
Its value, what no thought can ascertain,
Nor all an angel's eloquence explain.
Men deal with life as children with their play,
Who first misuse, then cast their toys away,
Live to no sober purpose, and contend,
That their Creator had no serious end.
When God and man stand opposite in view,
Man's disappointment must of course ensue.
The just Creator condescends to write,
In beams of inextinguishable light,
His names of wisdom, goodness, power, and love,
On all that blooms below, or shines above,

* "And;" Eds. 1782, 1786, 1787, 1788, Southey. "With;" Ed. 1793, and subsequent editions, except Southey's.

† "Bounty;" Ed. 1782, and editions up to 1808. "Bounty's;" Ed. 1808, and subsequent editions.

To catch the wandering notice of mankind,
And teach the world, if not perversely blind,
His gracious attributes, and prove the share
His offspring hold in his paternal care.
If, led from earthly things to things divine,
His creature thwart not his august design,
Then praise is heard instead of reasoning pride,
And captious cavil and complaint subside.
Nature, employed in her allotted place,
Is handmaid to the purposes of grace,
By good vouchsafed makes known superior good,
And bliss not seen by blessings understood:
That bliss, revealed in scripture, with a glow
Bright as the covenant-ensuring bow,
Fires all his feelings with a noble scorn
Of sensual evil, and thus Hope is born.
  Hope sets the stamp of vanity on all
That men have deemed substantial since the fall,
Yet has the wondrous virtue to educe
From emptiness itself a real use;
And while she takes, as at a father's hand,
What health and sober appetite demand,
From fading good derives, with chemic art,
That lasting happiness, a thankful heart.
Hope, with uplifted foot, set free from earth,
Pants for the place of her ethereal birth,
On steady wing* sails through the immense abyss,
Plucks amaranthine joys from bowers of bliss,
And crowns the soul, while yet a mourner here,
With wreaths like those triumphant spirits wear.
Hope, as an anchor firm and sure, holds fast

* "Wing;" Eds. 1782, 1786, 1787, 1788, 1793. "Wings;" Ed. 1794, and subsequent editions.

The Christian vessel, and defies the blast.
Hope! nothing else can nourish and secure
His new-born virtues, and preserve him pure.
Hope! let the wretch, once conscious of the joy,
Whom now despairing agonies destroy,
Speak, for he can, and none so well as he,
What treasures centre, what delights, in thee.
Had he the gems, the spices, and the land
That boasts the treasure, all at his command,
The fragrant grove, the inestimable mine,
Were light, when weighed against one smile of thine.
Though, clasped and cradled in his nurse's arms,
He shine with all a cherub's artless charms,
Man is the genuine offspring of revolt,
Stubborn and sturdy, a wild ass's colt;
His passions, like the watery stores that sleep
Beneath the smiling surface of the deep,
Wait but the lashes of a wintry storm,
To frown and roar, and shake his feeble form.
From infancy through childhood's giddy maze,
Froward at school, and fretful in his plays,
The puny tyrant burns to subjugate
The free republic of the whip-gig state.
If one, his equal in athletic frame,
Or, more provoking still, of nobler name,
Dare step across his arbitrary views,
An Iliad, only not in verse, ensues:
The little Greeks look trembling at the scales,
Till the best tongue, or heaviest hand, prevails.
Now see him launched into the world at large;
If priest, supinely droning o'er his charge,
Their fleece his pillow, and his weekly drawl,
Though short, too long, the price he pays for all;

If lawyer, loud whatever cause he plead,
But proudest of the worst, if that succeed;
Perhaps a grave physician, gathering fees,
Punctually paid for lengthening out disease,
No Cotton,* whose humanity sheds rays,
That make superior skill his second praise;
If arms engage him, he devotes to sport
His date of life, so likely to be short,
A soldier may be anything, if brave;
So may a tradesman, if not quite a knave.
Such stuff the world is made of; and mankind
To passion, interest, pleasure, whim, resigned,
Insist on, as if each were his own pope,
Forgiveness, and the privilege of hope;
But Conscience, in some awful, silent hour,
When captivating lusts have lost their power,
Perhaps when sickness, or some fearful dream,
Reminds him of religion, hated theme!
Starts from the down on which she lately slept,
And tells of laws despised, at least not kept,
Shows with a pointing finger, but no noise,
A pale procession of past sinful joys,
All witnesses of blessings foully scorned,
And life abused, and not to be suborned.
"Mark these," she says, "these, summoned from afar,

* Dr. Nathaniel Cotton, author of Visions in Verse, and other poems, once well known, kept a house at St. Albans for the reception of lunatic patients, and there, by his skilful treatment of Cowper himself, earned a just claim to be thus remembered and rewarded by the poet. When Cowper wrote these lines Dr. Cotton was far advanced in years; on the 2nd of August, 1788, he died, "aged 88 at least," according to the record in the parish register.

Begin their march to meet thee at the bar;
There find a judge inexorably just,
And perish there, as all presumption must."
Peace be to those (such peace as Earth can give)
Who live in pleasure, dead e'en while they live;
Born capable indeed of heavenly truth,
But down to latest age, from earliest youth,
Their mind a wilderness through want of care,
The plough of wisdom never entering there.
Peace (if insensibility may claim
A right to the meek honours of her name)
To men of pedigree, their noble race,
Emulous always of the nearest place
To any throne, except the throne of grace.
Let cottagers, and unenlightened swains,
Revere the laws they dream that Heaven ordains,
Resort on Sundays to the house of prayer,
And ask, and fancy they find, blessings there;
Themselves, perhaps, when weary they retreat
To enjoy cool nature in a country seat,
To exchange the centre of a thousand trades,
For clumps, and lawns, and temples, and cascades,
May now and then their velvet cushions take,
And seem to pray, for good example' sake,
Judging, in charity no doubt, the town
Pious enough, and having need of none.
Kind souls! to teach their tenantry to prize
What they themselves, without remorse, despise:
Nor hope have they, nor fear of aught to come,
As well for them had prophecy been dumb;
They could have held the conduct they pursue,
Had Paul of Tarsus lived and died a Jew;
And truth, proposed to reasoners wise as they,

Is a pearl cast, completely cast, away.
They die.—Death lends them, pleased, and as in sport,
All the grim honours of his ghastly court.
Far other paintings grace the chamber now,
Where late we saw the mimic landscape glow;
The busy heralds hang the sable scene
With mournful scutcheons, and dim lamps between,
Proclaim their titles to the crowd around,
But they that wore them, move not at the sound;
The coronet, placed idly at their head,
Adds nothing now to the degraded dead,
And e'en the star, that glitters on the bier,
Can only say,—" Nobility lies here."
Peace to all such—'twere pity to offend
By useless censure, whom we cannot mend,
Life without hope can close but in despair,
'Twas there we found them, and must leave them there.
As when two pilgrims in a forest stray,
Both may be lost, yet each in his own way,
So fares it with the multitudes beguiled
In vain opinion's waste and dangerous wild;
Ten thousand rove the brakes and thorns among,
Some eastward, and some westward, and all wrong:
But here, alas! the fatal difference lies,
Each man's belief is right in his own eyes;
And he that blames what they have blindly chose,
Incurs resentment for the love he shows.
Say, botanist, within whose province fall
The cedar and the hyssop on the wall,
Of all that deck the lanes, the fields, the bowers,
What parts the kindred tribes of weeds and flowers?

Sweet scent, or lovely form, or both combined,
Distinguish every cultivated kind,
The want of both denotes a meaner breed,
And Chloe from her garland picks the weed.
Thus hopes of every sort, whatever sect
Esteem them, sow them, rear them, and protect,
If wild in nature, and not duly found,
Gethsemane! in thy dear, hallowed ground,
That cannot bear the blaze of Scripture light,
Nor cheer the spirit, nor refresh the sight,
Nor animate the soul to Christian deeds,
(Oh cast them from thee!) are weeds, arrant weeds.*
Ethelred's house, the centre of six ways,
Diverging each from each, like equal rays,
Himself as bountiful as April rains,
Lord paramount of the surrounding plains,
Would give relief of bed and board to none,
But guests that sought it in the appointed ONE;
And they might enter at his open door,
Even till his spacious hall would hold no more.
He sent a servant forth by every road,
To sound his horn, and publish it abroad,
That all might mark—knight, menial, high, and low,
An ordinance it concerned them much to know.
If after all, some headstrong hardy lout
Would disobey, though sure to be shut out,
Could he with reason murmur at his case,
Himself sole author of his own disgrace?

* In the earliest editions this line was printed, "Oh cast them from thee! are weeds, arrant weeds." The parenthesis was inserted in the edition of 1793, and has been universally followed. If a conjectural alteration of the arrangement of the words were admissible, "Are weeds,—Oh cast them from thee!—arrant weeds," would seem to be an improvement.

No! the decree was just and without flaw,
And he that made had right to make the law,
His sovereign power and pleasure unrestrained,
The wrong was his who wrongfully complained.
Yet half mankind maintain a churlish strife
With him, the Donor of eternal life,
Because the deed, by which his love confirms
The largess He bestows, prescribes the terms.
Compliance with his will your lot ensures,
Accept it only, and the boon is yours.
And sure it is as kind to smile and give,
As with a frown to say, "Do this, and live."
Love is not pedler's trumpery, bought and sold;
He *will* give freely, or he *will* withhold;
His soul abhors a mercenary thought,
And him as deeply who abhors it not;
He stipulates indeed, but merely this,
That man will freely take an unbought bliss,
Will trust him for a faithful generous part,
Nor set a price upon a willing heart.
Of all the ways that seem to promise fair,
To place you where his saints his presence share,
This only can; for this plain cause, expressed
In terms as plain, himself has shut the rest.
But oh! the strife, the bickering, and debate,
The tidings of unpurchased Heaven create,
The flirted fan, the bridle, and the toss,
All speakers, yet all language at a loss.
From stuccoed walls smart arguments rebound,
And beaus, adepts in every thing profound,
Die of disdain, or whistle off the sound;
Such is the clamour of rooks, daws, and kites,
The explosion of the levelled tube excites,

Where mouldering abbey walls o'erhang the glade,
And oaks coeval spread a mournful shade,
The screaming nations, hovering in mid air,
Loudly resent the stranger's freedom there,
And seem to warn him never to repeat
His bold intrusion on their dark retreat.
"Adieu," Vinosa cries, ere yet he sips,
The purple bumper trembling at his lips,
"Adieu to all morality, if Grace
Make works a vain ingredient in the case.
The Christian Hope is—Waiter, draw the cork—
If I mistake not—Blockhead! with a fork!
Without good works, whatever some may boast,
Mere folly and delusion—Sir, your toast.
My firm persuasion is, at least sometimes,
That Heaven will weigh man's virtues and his crimes,
With nice attention in a righteous scale,
And save or damn as these or those prevail.
I plant my foot upon this ground of trust,
And silence every fear with—God is just.
But if, perchance, on some dull, drizzling day,
A thought intrude, that says, or seems to say,
If thus the important cause is to be tried,
Suppose the beam should dip on the wrong side;
I soon recover from these needless frights,
And—God is merciful—sets all to rights.
Thus between Justice, as my prime support,
And Mercy, fled to as the last resort,
I glide and steal along with heaven in view,
And—pardon me, the bottle stands with you."
"I never will believe," the colonel cries,
"The sanguinary schemes that some devise,

Who make the good Creator on their plan
A being of less equity than man.
If appetite, or what divines call lust,
Which men comply with e'en because they must,
Be punished with perdition, who is pure?
Then theirs, no doubt, as well as mine, is sure.
If sentence of eternal pain belong
To every sudden slip and transient wrong,
Then heaven enjoins the fallible and frail
A hopeless task, and damns them if they fail.
My creed (whatever some creed-makers mean
By Athanasian nonsense, or Nicene)
My creed is, he is safe that does his best,
And death's a doom sufficient for the rest."
"Right," says an ensign, "and for aught I see,
Your faith and mine substantially agree;
The best of every man's performance here
Is to discharge the duties of his sphere.
A lawyer's dealings* should be just and fair,
Honesty shines with great advantage there;
Fasting and prayer sit well upon a priest,
A decent caution and reserve at least;
A soldier's best is courage in the field,
With nothing here that wants to be concealed,
Manly deportment, gallant, easy, gay,
A hand as liberal as the light of day;
The soldier thus endowed, who never shrinks,
Nor closets up his thoughts, whate'er he thinks,
Who scorns to do an injury by stealth,
Must go to heaven—and I must drink his health.

* "Dealing;" Eds. 1782, 1786, 1787, 1788, and Southey. "Dealings;" Ed. 1793, and subsequent editions, except Southey's.

Sir Smug," he cries (for lowest at the board,
Just made fifth chaplain of his patron lord,
His shoulders witnessing by many a shrug,
How much his feelings suffered, sat Sir Smug)
" Your office is to winnow false from true;
Come, prophet, drink, and tell us what think you."
Sighing and smiling as he takes his glass,
Which they that woo preferment rarely pass,
" Fallible man," the church-bred youth replies,
" Is still found fallible, however wise;
And differing judgments serve but to declare,
That truth lies somewhere, if we knew but where.
Of all it ever was my lot to read
Of critics now alive or long since dead,
The book of all the world that charmed me most
Was—welladay, the title page was lost;
The writer well remarks, a heart, that knows
To take with gratitude what heaven bestows,
With prudence always ready at our call,
To guide our use of it, is all in all.
Doubtless it is. To which, of my own store,
I superadd a few essentials more;
But these, excuse the liberty I take,
I wave just now, for conversation' sake."
" Spoke like an oracle," they all exclaim,
And add Right Reverend to Smug's honoured name.
And yet our lot is given us in a land
Where busy arts are never at a stand,
Where Science points her telescopic eye,
Familiar with the wonders of the sky,
Where bold Inquiry, diving out of sight,
Brings many a precious pearl of truth to light,
Where nought eludes the persevering quest,

That Fashion, Taste, or Luxury suggest.
But above all, in her own light arrayed,
See Mercy's grand apocalypse displayed!
The Sacred Book no longer suffers wrong,
Bound in the fetters of an unknown tongue,
But speaks with plainness art could never mend,
What simplest minds can soonest comprehend.
God gives the word, the preachers throng around,
Live from his lips, and spread the glorious sound:
That sound bespeaks Salvation on her way,
The trumpet of a life-restoring day;
'Tis heard where England's Eastern glory shines,
And in the gulfs of her Cornubian mines,
And still it spreads. See Germany send forth
Her sons* to pour it on the farthest north:
Fired with a zeal peculiar, they defy
The rage and rigour of a polar sky,
And plant successfully sweet Sharon's rose,
On icy plains, and in eternal snows.
O blessed within the enclosure of your rocks,
Nor herds have ye to boast, nor bleating flocks,
No fertilizing streams your fields divide,
That show reversed the villas on their side;
No groves have ye; nor cheerful sound of bird,
Or voice of turtle in your land is heard;

The Moravian Missionaries in Greenland.—See Crantz (C). David Crantz's History of Greenland, containing an account of the Moravian missionary settlements in that country, was printed in English as early as 1767. In Cowper's time attention was particularly directed to the subject by several works of Benjamin La Trobe. One entitled the Ancient and Modern History of the Brethren, which was a translation of another work by Crantz, was published in 1780, the year before the composition of the present poem.

Nor grateful eglantine regales the smell
Of those that walk at evening where ye dwell;
But Winter, armed with terrors here unknown,
Sits absolute on his unshaken throne;
Piles up his stores amidst the frozen waste,
And bids the mountains he has built, stand fast;
Beckons the legions of his storms away
From happier scenes, to make your land a prey;
Proclaims the soil a conquest he has won,
And scorns to share it with the distant sun.
—Yet Truth is yours, remote, unenvied isle!
And Peace the genuine offspring of her smile;
The pride of lettered ignorance, that binds
In chains of error our accomplished minds,
That decks, with all the splendour of the true,
A false religion, is unknown to you.
Nature indeed vouchsafes for our delight
The sweet vicissitudes of day and night;
Soft airs and genial moisture feed and cheer
Field, fruit, and flower, and every creature here;
But brighter beams than his who fires the skies,
Have risen at length on your admiring eyes,
That shoot into your darkest caves the day,
From which our nicer optics turn away.
Here see the encouragement Grace gives to vice,
The dire effect of Mercy without price!
What were they? What some fools are made by art,
They were by nature, atheists, head and heart.
The gross idolatry blind heathens teach
Was too refined for them, beyond their reach;
Not e'en the glorious sun, though men revere
The monarch most that seldom will appear,
And though his beams, that quicken where they shine,

May claim some right to be esteemed divine,
Not e'en the sun, desirable as rare,
Could bend one knee, engage one votary there;
They were, what base credulity believes
True Christians are, dissemblers, drunkards, thieves.
The full-gorged savage, at his nauseous feast
Spent half the darkness, and snored out the rest,
Was one, whom Justice, on an equal plan
Denouncing death upon the sins of man,
Might also have indulged with an escape,
Chargeable only with a human shape.
What are they now?—Morality may spare
Her grave concern, her kind suspicions, there;
The wretch, who once sang wildly, danced, and laughed,
And sucked in dizzy madness with his draught,
Has wept a silent flood, reversed his ways,
Is sober, meek, benevolent, and prays;
Feeds sparingly, communicates his store,
Abhors the craft he boasted of before,
And he that stole has learned to steal no more.
Well spake the prophet,—"Let the desert sing,
Where sprang the thorn, the spiry fir shall spring,
And where unsightly and rank thistles grew,
Shall grow the myrtle, and luxuriant yew."*
Go now, and with important tone demand
On what foundation virtue is to stand,
If self-exalting claims be turned adrift,
And grace be grace indeed, and life a gift;
The poor reclaimed inhabitant, his eyes
Gliştening at once with pity and surprise,
Amazed that shadows should obscure the sight

* Isaiah, lv. 13.

Of one, whose birth was in a land of light,
Shall answer;—"Hope, sweet Hope, has set me free,
And made all pleasures else mere dross to me."
These, amidst scenes as waste as if denied
The common care that waits on all beside,
Wild as if nature there, void of all good,
Played only gambols in a frantic mood,
(Yet charge not heavenly skill with having planned
A plaything world, unworthy of his hand;)
Can see his love, though secret evil lurks
In all we touch, stamped plainly on his works;
Deem life a blessing with its numerous woes,
Nor spurn away a gift a God bestows.
Hard task indeed o'er arctic seas to roam!
Is Hope exotic? Grows it not at home?
Yes; but an object bright as orient morn,
May press the eye too closely to be borne;
A distant virtue we can all confess,
It hurts our pride, and moves our envy less.
Leuconomus (beneath well sounding Greek
I slur a name* a poet must not speak)
Stood pilloried on infamy's high stage,
And bore the pelting scorn of half an age;
The very butt of Slander, and the blot
For every dart that Malice ever shot.
The man that mentioned him, at once dismissed
All mercy from his lips, and sneered, and hissed;
His crimes were such as Sodom never knew,
And Perjury stood up to swear all true;
His aim was mischief, and his zeal pretence,
His speech rebellion against common sense;
A knave, when tried on honesty's plain rule,

* Whitfield, the celebrated preacher.

And when by that of reason, a mere fool;
The world's best comfort was, his doom was passed,
Die when he might, he must be damned at last.
Now, Truth, perform thine office; waft aside
The curtain drawn by Prejudice and Pride,
Reveal (the man is dead) to wondering eyes
This more than monster in his proper guise.
He loved the world that hated him; the tear
That dropped upon his Bible was sincere;
Assailed by scandal and the tongue of strife,
His only answer was a blameless life,
And he that forged, and he that threw, the dart,
Had each a brother's interest in his heart.
Paul's love of Christ, and steadiness unbribed,
Were copied close in him, and well transcribed;
He followed Paul, his zeal a kindred flame,
His apostolic charity the same;
Like him, crossed cheerfully tempestuous seas,
Forsaking country, kindred, friends, and ease;
Like him he laboured, and like him content
To bear it, suffered shame where'er he went.
Blush, Calumny! and write upon his tomb,
If honest eulogy can spare thee room,
Thy deep repentance of thy thousand lies,
Which, aimed at him, have pierced the offended skies;
And say;—"Blot out my sin, confessed, deplored,
Against thine image, in thy saint, O Lord!"
No blinder bigot, I maintain it still,
Than he who must have pleasure, come what will:
He laughs, whatever weapon Truth may draw,
And deems her sharp artillery mere straw.
Scripture indeed is plain, but God and he

On Scripture ground are sure to disagree;
Some wiser rule must teach him how to live,
Than this his Maker has seen fit to give,
Supple and flexible as Indian cane,
To take the bend his appetites ordain,
Contrived to suit frail nature's crazy case,
And reconcile his lusts with saving grace.
By this, with nice precision of design,
He draws upon life's map a zig-zag line,
That shows how far 'tis safe to follow sin,
And where his danger and God's wrath begin.
By this he forms, as pleased he sports along,
His well poised estimate of right and wrong,
And finds the modish manners of the day,
Though loose, as harmless as an infant's play.
  Build by whatever plan caprice decrees,
With what materials, on what ground, you please,
Your Hope shall stand unblamed, perhaps admired,
If not that Hope the Scripture has required.
The strange conceits, vain projects, and wild dreams,
With which Hypocrisy for ever teems,
(Though other follies strike the public eye,
And raise a laugh) pass unmolested by;
But if, unblameable in word and thought,
A MAN arise, a man whom God has taught,
With all Elijah's dignity of tone,
And all the love of the beloved John,
To storm the citadels they build in air,
And smite the untempered wall 'tis death to spare;
To sweep away all refuges of lies,
And place, instead of quirks themselves devise,
LAMA SABACTHANI before their eyes;
To prove that without Christ all gain is loss,

All hope despair, that stands not on his cross;—
Except the few his God may have impressed,
A tenfold frenzy seizes all the rest.
Throughout mankind, the Christian kind at least,
There dwells a consciousness in every breast,
That folly ends where genuine Hope begins,
And he that finds his Heaven must lose his sins.
Nature opposes with her utmost force
This riving stroke, this ultimate divorce,
And, while religion seems to be her view,
Hates with a deep sincerity the true:
For this, of all that ever influenced man,
Since Abel worshipped, or the world began,
This only spares no lust, admits no plea,
But makes him, if at all, completely free;
Sounds forth the signal, as she mounts her car,
Of an eternal, universal war;
Rejects all treaty, penetrates all wiles,
Scorns with the same indifference frowns and smiles,
Drives through the realms of Sin, where Riot reels,
And grinds his crown beneath her burning wheels!
Hence all that is in man,—pride, passion, art,
Powers of the mind, and feelings of the heart,—
Insensible of Truth's almighty charms,
Starts at her first approach, and sounds to arms!
While Bigotry, with well dissembled fears,
His eyes shut fast, his fingers in his ears,
Mighty to parry and push-by God's word
With senseless noise, his argument the sword,
Pretends a zeal for godliness and grace,
And spits abhorrence in the Christian's face.
Parent of Hope, immortal Truth! make known
Thy deathless wreaths, and triumphs all thine own:

The silent progress of thy power is such,
Thy means so feeble, and despised so much,
That few believe the wonders thou hast wrought,
And none can teach them but whom thou hast taught.
Oh! see me sworn to serve thee, and command
A painter's skill into a poet's hand,
That while I trembling trace a work divine,
Fancy may stand aloof from the design,
And light and shade, and every stroke be thine.
If ever thou hast felt another's pain,
If ever when he sighed, hast sighed again,
If ever on thy eyelid stood the tear
That Pity had engendered, drop one here.
This man was happy—had the World's good word,
And with it every joy it can afford;
Friendship and Love seemed tenderly at strife,
Which most should sweeten his untroubled life;
Politely learned, and of a gentle race,
Good breeding and good sense gave all a grace,
And whether at the toilet of the fair
He laughed and trifled, made him welcome there,
Or if in masculine debate he shared,
Ensured him mute attention and regard.
Alas, how changed! Expressive of his mind,
His eyes are sunk, arms folded, head reclined;
Those awful syllables, Hell, Death, and Sin,
Though whispered, plainly tell what works within,
That conscience there performs her proper part,
And writes a Doomsday sentence on his heart.
Forsaking, and forsaken of all friends,
He now perceives where earthly pleasure ends;
Hard task! for one who lately knew no care,

And harder still as learnt beneath despair;
His hours no longer pass unmarked away,
A dark importance saddens every day;
He hears the notice of the clock, perplexed,
And cries, "Perhaps eternity strikes next!"
Sweet music is no longer music here,
And laughter sounds like madness in his ear;
His grief the world of all her power disarms,
Wine has no taste, and beauty has no charms;
God's holy word, once trivial in his view,
Now by the voice of his experience true,
Seems, as it is, the fountain whence alone
Must spring that Hope he pants to make his own.
Now let the bright reverse be known abroad;
Say man's a worm, and power belongs to God.
As when a felon, whom his country's laws
Have justly doomed, for some atrocious cause,
Expects in darkness and heart-chilling fears,
The shameful close of all his misspent years,
If chance, on heavy pinions slowly borne,
A tempest usher in the dreaded morn,
Upon his dungeon walls the lightning* play,
The thunder seems to summon him away,
The warder at the door his key applies,
Shoots back the bolt, and all his courage dies:
If then, just then, all thoughts of mercy lost,
When Hope, long lingering, at last yields the ghost,
The sound of pardon pierce his startled ear,
He drops at once his fetters and his fear,
A transport glows in all he looks and speaks,

* "Lightnings;" Eds. 1782, 1786, 1821, Southey, Bell. "Lightning;" Ed. 1787, and subsequent editions, except those mentioned above.

And the first thankful tears bedew his cheeks.
Joy, far superior Joy, that much outweighs
The comfort of a few poor, added days,
Invades, possesses, and o'erwhelms the soul
Of him whom Hope has with a touch made whole.
'Tis Heaven, all Heaven, descending on the wings
Of the glad legions of the King of kings;
'Tis more—'tis God diffused through every part,
'Tis God himself triumphant in his heart.
Oh! welcome now the sun's once hated light,
His noonday beams were never half so bright.
Not kindred minds alone are called to employ
Their hours, their days, in listening to his joy,
Unconscious nature, all that he surveys,
Rocks, groves, and streams, must join him in his praise.

These are thy glorious works, eternal Truth,
The scoff of withered age and beardless youth;
These move the censure and illiberal grin
Of fools that hate thee and delight in sin;
But these shall last when night has quenched the pole,
And heaven is all departed as a scroll,
And when, as Justice has long since decreed,
This earth shall blaze, and a new world succeed,
Then these thy glorious works, and they who* share
That Hope which can alone exclude despair,
Shall live exempt from weakness and decay,
The brightest wonders of an endless day.

Happy the bard, (if that fair name belong
To him that blends no fable with his song)

* "That;" Eds. 1782, 1786, Southey. "Who;" Ed. 1787, and subsequent editions, except Southey's.

Whose lines uniting, by an honest art,
The faithful monitor's and poet's part,
Seek to delight, that they may mend mankind,
And while they captivate, inform the mind;
Still happier, if he till a thankful soil,
And fruit reward his honourable toil;
But happier far, who comfort those that wait
To hear plain truth at Judah's hallowed gate;
Their language simple, as their manners meek,
No shining ornaments have they to seek,
Nor labour they, nor time nor talents waste,
In sorting flowers to suit a fickle taste;
But while they speak the wisdom of the skies,
Which art can only darken and disguise,
The abundant harvest, recompense divine,
Repays their work—the gleaning only mine.

CHARITY.*

Quo nihil majus meliusve terris
Fata donavêre, bonique divi;
Nec dabunt, quamvis redeant in aurum
Tempora priscum.
HOR. Lib. iv. Ode 2.

FAIREST and foremost of the train that wait
On man's most dignified and happiest state,
Whether we name thee Charity or Love,
Chief grace below, and all in all above,

* First published, like all the preceding poems, in Cowper's earliest volume of Poems, Lond. 1782, 8vo. "Charity" was

Prosper (I press thee with a powerful plea)
A task I venture on, impelled by thee:
Oh! never seen but in thy blest effects,
Nor* felt but in the soul that Heaven selects;
Who seeks to praise thee, and to make thee known
To other hearts, must have thee in his own.
Come, prompt me with benevolent desires,
Teach me to kindle at thy gentle fires,
And, though disgraced and slighted, to redeem
A poet's name, by making thee the theme.
God, working ever on a social plan,
By various ties attaches man to man;
He made at first, though free and unconfined,
One man the common father of the kind,
That every tribe, though placed as he sees best,
Where seas or deserts part them from the rest,
Differing in language, manners, or in face,
Might feel themselves allied to all the race.
When Cook†—lamented, and with tears as just
As ever mingled with heroic dust—
Steered Britain's oak into a world unknown,
And in his country's glory sought his own;
Wherever he found man to nature true,
The rights of man were sacred in his view;
He soothed with gifts, and greeted with a smile,

written immediately after "Hope," in June and July, 1781. (See Cowper's Letter to Newton, 12 July, 1781.)

* "Nor;" Eds. 1782, 1786, 1787, 1788, and Southey. "Or;" Ed. 1793, and subsequent editions, except Southey's.

† The death of Captain Cook was in 1781 a recent subject of public grief. The event was universally looked upon as a great national misfortune, and the general regret was demonstrated by heaping honours on the deceased, and providing liberally for all who were dependent upon him.

The simple native of the new found isle;
He spurned the wretch that slighted, or withstood,
The tender argument of kindred blood,
Nor would endure that any should control
His freeborn brethren of the southern pole.
But though some nobler minds a law respect,
That none shall with impunity neglect,
In baser souls unnumbered evils meet,
To thwart its influence, and its end defeat.
While Cook is loved for savage lives he saved,
See Cortez odious for a world enslaved!
Where wast thou then, sweet Charity? Where then,
Thou tutelary friend of helpless men?
Wast thou in monkish cells and nunneries found,
Or building hospitals on English ground?
No.—Mammon makes the world his legatee
Through fear, not love; and Heaven abhors the fee.
Wherever found (and all men need thy care)
Nor age nor infancy could find thee there;
The hand that slew till it could slay no more,
Was glued to the sword-hilt with Indian gore.
Their prince, as justly seated on his throne
As vain imperial Philip on his own,
Tricked out of all his royalty by art,
That stripped him bare, and broke his honest heart,
Died by the sentence of a shaven priest,
For scorning what they taught him to detest.*

* It was first pointed out in Southey's Cowper, VIII. 234, in a note contributed by "the learned Editor of the last Edition of Mitford's History of Greece," that there is a confusion running through the historical facts stated in this passage, relating to Philip II, Cortez, and the Indian Prince. Cowper, writing from memory, for he possessed but a very slender library, and had no access to any collection of books,

How dark the veil that intercepts the blaze
Of Heaven's mysterious purposes and ways;
God stood not, though he seemed to stand, aloof,
And at this hour the conqueror feels the proof;
The wreath he won drew down an instant curse,
The fretting plague is in the public purse,
The cankered spoil corrodes the pining state,
Starved by that indolence their mines create.
Oh! could their ancient Incas rise again,
How would they take up Israel's taunting strain!*
"Art thou too fallen, Iberia? Do we see
The robber and the murderer weak as we?
Thou that hast wasted earth, and dared despise
Alike the wrath and mercy of the skies,
Thy pemp is in the grave, thy glory laid
Low in the pits thine avarice has made.
We come with joy from our eternal rest,
To see the oppressor in his turn oppressed.
Art thou the god, the thunder of whose hand
Rolled over all our desolated land,
Shook principalities and kingdoms down,
And made the mountains tremble at his frown?
The sword shall light upon thy boasted powers,
And waste them, as thy sword has wasted ours."
'Tis thus Omnipotence his law fulfils,
And Vengeance executes what Justice wills.
Again—the band of commerce was designed
To associate all the branches of mankind;

mistook Philip for Charles V, mixed up the exploits of Cortez with those of Pizarro, and the death of Montezuma with that of Atuahalpa. The real facts have been rendered familiar to all readers by more recent publications; but the moral lesson designed by the poet remains untouched.

* Isaiah, xiv. 10, 11.

And if a boundless plenty be the robe,
Trade is the golden girdle of the globe.
Wise to promote whatever end he means,
God opens fruitful Nature's various scenes;
Each climate needs what other climes produce,
And offers something to the general use,
No land but listens to the common call,
And in return receives supply from all.
This genial intercourse, and mutual aid,
Cheers what were else a universal shade,
Calls Nature from her ivy-mantled den,
And softens human rock-work into men.

Ingenious Art, with her expressive face,
Steps forth to fashion and refine the race,
Not only fills Necessity's demand,
But overcharges her capacious hand:
Capricious Taste itself can crave no more
Than she supplies from her abounding store:
She strikes out all that Luxury can ask,
And gains new vigour at her endless task.
Hers is the spacious arch, the shapely spire,
The painter's pencil, and the poet's lyre;
From her the canvass borrows light and shade,
And verse, more lasting, hues that never fade;
She guides the finger o'er the dancing keys,
Gives difficulty all the grace of ease,
And pours a torrent of sweet notes around,
Fast as the thirsting ear can drink the sound.

These are the gifts of Art; and Art thrives most
Where Commerce has enriched the busy coast;
He catches all improvements in his flight,
Spreads foreign wonders in his country's sight,
Imports what others have invented well,

And stirs his own to match them, or excel.
'Tis thus, reciprocating each with each,
Alternately the nations learn and teach,
While Providence enjoins to every soul
A union with the vast terraqueous whole.
  Heaven speed the canvass, gallantly unfurled
To furnish and accommodate a world,
To give the pole the produce of the sun,
And knit the unsocial climates into one.
Soft airs and gentle heavings of the wave
Impel the fleet whose errand is to save,
To succour wasted regions, and replace
The smile of opulence in sorrow's face.
Let nothing adverse, nothing unforeseen,
Impede the bark that ploughs the deep serene,
Charged with a freight transcending in its worth
The gems of India, Nature's rarest birth,
That flies, like Gabriel on his Lord's commands,
A herald of God's love to pagan lands.
But ah! what wish can prosper, or what prayer,
For merchants rich in cargoes of despair,
Who drive a loathsome traffic, gauge and span
And buy the muscles and the bones of man?
The tender ties of father, husband, friend,
All bonds of nature, in that moment end,
And each endures, while yet he draws his breath,
A stroke as fatal as the scythe of Death.
The sable warrior, frantic with regret
Of her he loves, and never can forget,
Loses in tears the far receding shore,
But not the thought that they must meet no more;
Deprived of her and freedom at a blow,
What has he left that he can yet forego?

Yes, to deep sadness sullenly resigned,
He feels his body's bondage in his mind,
Puts off his generous nature, and, to suit
His manners with his fate, puts on the brute.
O most degrading of all ills that wait
On man, a mourner in his best estate!
All other sorrows virtue may endure,
And find submission more than half a cure;
Grief is itself a medicine, and bestowed
To improve the fortitude that bears the load,
To teach the wanderer, as his woes increase,
The path of wisdom, all whose paths are peace;
But slavery!—Virtue dreads it as her grave;
Patience itself is meanness in a slave:
Or if the will and sovereignty of God
Bid suffer it awhile, and kiss the rod,
Wait for the dawning of a brighter day,
And snap the chain the moment when you may.
Nature imprints upon whate'er we see,
That has a heart and life in it, "Be free!"
The beasts are chartered—neither age nor force
Can quell the love of freedom in a horse:
He breaks the cord that held him at the rack,
And conscious of an unincumbered back,
Snuffs up the morning air, forgets the rein,
Loose fly his forelock and his ample mane,
Responsive to the distant neigh he neighs,
Nor stops, till, overleaping all delays,
He finds the pasture where his fellows graze.
Canst thou, and honoured with a Christian name,
Buy what is woman-born, and feel no shame?
Trade in the blood of innocence, and plead
Expedience as a warrant for the deed?

So may the wolf, whom famine has made bold
To quit the forest and invade the fold;
So may the ruffian, who with ghostly glide,
Dagger in hand, steals close to your bedside;
Not he, but his emergence, forced the door,
He found it inconvenient to be poor.
Has God then given its sweetness to the cane,
Unless his laws be trampled on,—in vain?
Built a brave world, which cannot yet subsist,
Unless his right to rule it be dismissed?
Impudent blasphemy! So Folly pleads,
And, Avarice being judge, with ease succeeds.
But grant the plea, and let it stand for just,
That man make man his prey, because he must;
Still there is room for pity to abate
And soothe the sorrows of so sad a state.
A Briton knows, or if he knows it not,
The Scripture placed within his reach he ought,
That souls have no discriminating hue,
Alike important in their Maker's view;
That none are free from blemish since the fall,
And Love Divine has paid one price for all.
The wretch that works and weeps without relief
Has one that notices his silent grief.
He from whose hands alone all power proceeds,
Ranks its abuse among the foulest deeds,
Considers all injustice with a frown,
But marks the man that treads his fellow down.
Begone! the whip and bell in that hard hand
Are hateful ensigns of usurped command;
Not Mexico could purchase kings a claim
To scourge him, weariness his only blame.
Remember, Heaven has an avenging rod;

To smite the poor is treason against God.
Trouble is grudgingly and hardly brooked,
While life's sublimest joys are overlooked;
We wander o'er a sunburnt thirsty soil,
Murmuring and weary of our daily toil,
Forget to enjoy the palm-tree's offered shade,
Or taste the fountain in the neighbouring glade;
Else who would lose, that had the power to improve,
The occasion of transmuting fear to love?
Oh! 'tis a godlike privilege to save,
And he that scorns it is himself a slave.—
Inform his mind; one flash of heavenly day
Would heal his heart, and melt his chains away.
"Beauty for ashes"* is a gift indeed,
And slaves, by truth enlarged, are doubly freed.
Then would he say, submissive at thy feet,
While Gratitude and Love made service sweet,
"My dear deliverer out of hopeless night,
Whose bounty bought me but to give me light,
I was a bondman on my native plain,
Sin forged, and Ignorance made fast, the chain;
Thy lips have shed instruction as the dew,
Taught me what path to shun, and what pursue;
Farewell, my former joys! I sigh no more
For Africa's once loved, benighted shore;
Serving a benefactor, I am free;
At my best home, if not exiled from thee."
Some men make gain a fountain, whence proceeds
A stream of liberal and heroic deeds;
The swell of pity, not to be confined
Within the scanty limits of the mind,

* Isaiah, lxi. 3.

Disdains the Bank, and throws the golden sands,
A rich deposit, on the bordering lands:
These have an ear for his paternal call,
Who makes some rich for the supply of all,
God's gift with pleasure in his praise employ,
And THORNTON* is familiar with the joy.
Oh! could I worship aught beneath the skies,
That earth has seen, or fancy can devise,
Thine altar, sacred Liberty, should stand,
Built by no mercenary vulgar hand,
With fragrant turf, and flowers as wild and fair
As ever dressed a bank, or scented summer air.
Duly, as ever on the mountain's height
The peep of morning shed a dawning light,
Again, when evening in her sober vest
Drew the grey curtain of the fading west,
My soul should yield thee willing thanks and praise,
For the chief blessings of my fairest days:
But that were sacrilege;—praise is not thine,
But his who gave thee, and preserves thee mine:
Else I would say, and as I spake, bid fly
A captive bird into the boundless sky;—
"This triple realm adores thee;—thou art come
From Sparta hither, and art here at home.
We feel thy force still active, at this hour
Enjoy immunity from priestly power,
While Conscience, happier than in ancient years,
Owns no superior but the God she fears.
Propitious Spirit! yet expunge a wrong

Thornton's name ought not to require a note; but it may be necessary to inform some readers that he was an eminent London merchant, who devoted a large portion of his princely wealth to charitable and religious objects. His anxiety to do good is exemplified in our memoir of Cowper.

Thy rights have suffered, and our land, too long,
Teach mercy to ten thousand hearts that share
The fears and hopes of a commercial care.
Prisons expect the wicked, and were built
To bind the lawless, and to punish guilt,
But shipwreck, earthquake, battle, fire, and flood,
Are mighty mischiefs, not to be withstood,
And honest Merit stands on slippery ground,
Where covert guile and artifice abound.
Let just Restraint, for public peace designed,
Chain up the wolves and tigers of mankind;
The foe of virtue has no claim to thee,
But let insolvent innocence go free."
Patron of else the most despised of men,
Accept the tribute of a stranger's pen;
Verse, like the laurel, its immortal meed,
Should be the guerdon of a noble deed;
I may alarm thee, but I fear the shame
(Charity chosen as my theme and aim)
I must incur, forgetting HOWARD's* name.
Blessed with all wealth can give thee, to resign
Joys doubly sweet to feelings quick as thine,
To quit the bliss thy rural scenes bestow,
To seek a nobler amidst scenes of woe,
To traverse seas, range kingdoms, and bring home,
Not the proud monuments of Greece or Rome,

* When Cowper wrote these lines Howard was energetically pressing forward in his philanthropic career. He had received the thanks of the House of Commons; he had published his book on the "State of Prisons," with its appendix; and he had been made by Burke the subject of that panegyric which has bound up his fame with our language, and will make the memory of his achievements live as long as our mother-tongue shall endure.

But knowledge such as only dungeons teach,
And only sympathy like thine could reach;
That grief, sequestered from the public stage,
Might smooth her feathers, and enjoy her cage,
Speaks a divine ambition, and a zeal,
The boldest patriot might be proud to feel.
Oh that the voice of clamour and debate,
That pleads for peace till it disturbs the state,
Were hushed in favour of thy generous plea,
The poor thy clients, and Heaven's smile thy fee!
  Philosophy, that does not dream or stray,
Walks arm in arm with Nature all his way,
Compasses earth, dives into it, ascends
Whatever steep inquiry recommends,
Sees planetary wonders smoothly roll
Round other systems under her control,
Drinks wisdom at the milky stream of light,
That cheers the silent journey of the night,
And brings, at his return, a bosom charged
With rich instruction, and a soul enlarged.
The treasured sweets of the capacious plan
That Heaven spreads wide before the view of man,
All prompt his pleased pursuit, and to pursue
Still prompt him, with a pleasure always new;
He too has a connecting power, and draws
Man to the centre of the common cause,
Aiding a dubious and deficient sight,
With a new medium and a purer light.
  All truth is precious, if not all divine,
And what dilates the powers must needs refine.
He reads the skies, and, watching every change,
Provides the faculties an ampler range,
And wins mankind, as his attempts prevail,

A prouder station on the general scale.
But Reason still, unless divinely taught,
Whate'er she learns, learns nothing as she ought;
The lamp of revelation only shows,
What human wisdom cannot but oppose,
That man, in Nature's richest mantle clad,
And graced with all Philosophy can add,
Though fair without, and luminous within,
Is still the progeny and heir of sin.
Thus taught, down falls the plumage of his pride;
He feels his need of an unerring guide,
And knows that falling he shall rise no more,
Unless the power that bade him stand, restore.
This is indeed Philosophy; this known
Makes wisdom, worthy of the name, his own;
And without this, whatever he discuss,
Whether the space between the stars and us,
Whether he measure earth, compute the sea,
Weigh sunbeams, carve a fly, or spit a flea,
The solemn trifler, with his boasted skill,
Toils much, and is a solemn trifler still:
Blind was he born, and his misguided eyes
Grown dim in trifling studies, blind he dies.
Self-knowledge truly learned of course implies
The rich possession of a nobler prize;
For self to self, and God to man revealed
(Two themes to Nature's eye for ever sealed)
Are taught by rays that fly with equal pace
From the same centre of enlightening grace.
Here stay thy foot; how copious, and how clear,
The o'erflowing well of Charity springs here!
Hark! 'tis the music of a thousand rills,
Some through the groves, some down the sloping hills,

Winding a secret or an open course,
And all supplied from an eternal source.
The ties of Nature do but feebly bind,
And Commerce partially reclaims mankind;
Philosophy, without his heavenly guide,
May blow up self-conceit, and nourish pride,
But while his province is the reasoning part,
Has still a veil of midnight on his heart:
'Tis Truth divine, exhibited on earth,
Gives Charity her being and her birth.

Suppose (when thought is warm, and fancy flows,
What will not argument sometimes suppose?)
An isle possessed by creatures of our kind,
Endued with reason, yet by nature blind.
Let supposition lend her aid once more,
And land some grave optician on the shore;
He claps his lens, if haply they may see,
Close to the part where vision ought to be,
But finds that though his tubes assist the sight,
They cannot give it, or make darkness light.
He reads wise lectures, and describes aloud
A sense they know not, to the wondering crowd;
He talks of light, and the prismatic hues,
As men of depth in erudition use;
But all he gains for his harangue is;—"Well!
What monstrous lies some travellers will tell."

The soul, whose sight all-quickening grace renews,
Takes the resemblance of the good she views,
As diamonds, stripped of their opaque disguise,
Reflect the noonday glory of the skies.
She speaks of Him, her author, guardian, friend,
Whose Love knew no beginning, knows no end,
In language warm as all that love inspires,

And, in the glow of her intense desires,
Pants to communicate her noble fires.
She sees a world stark blind to what employs
Her eager thought, and feeds her flowing joys,
Though Wisdom hail them, heedless of her call,
Flies to save some, and feels a pang for all:
Herself as weak as her support is strong,
She feels that frailty she denied so long,
And, from a knowledge of her own disease,
Learns to compassionate the sick she sees.
Here see, acquitted of all vain pretence,
The reign of genuine Charity commence;
Though Scorn repay her sympathetic tears,
She still is kind, and still she perseveres;
The Truth she loves a sightless world blaspheme,
'Tis childish dotage, a delirious dream!
The danger they discern not, they deny,
Laugh at their only remedy, and die.
But still a soul thus touched can never cease,
Whoever threatens war, to speak of peace.
Pure in her aim, and in her temper mild,
Her wisdom seems the weakness of a child;
She makes excuses where she might condemn,
Reviled by those that hate her, prays for them;
Suspicion lurks not in her artless breast,
The worst suggested, she believes the best;
Not soon provoked, however stung and teased,
And if perhaps made angry, soon appeased;
She rather waives than will dispute her right,
And injured, makes forgiveness her delight.

Such was the portrait an apostle drew,
The bright original was one he knew,
Heaven held his hand, the likeness must be true.

When one that holds communion with the skies,
Has filled his urn where these pure waters rise,
And once more mingles with us meaner things,
'Tis e'en as if an angel shook his wings;
Immortal fragrance fills the circuit wide,
That tells us whence his treasures are supplied.
So when a ship, well freighted with the stores
The sun matures on India's spicy shores,
Has dropped her anchor, and her canvass furled,
In some safe haven of our western world,
'Twere vain inquiry to what port she went,
The gale informs us, laden with the scent.
Some seek, when queasy conscience has its qualms,
To lull the painful malady with alms;
But Charity not feigned intends alone
Another's good;—theirs centres in their own;
And too short lived to reach the realms of peace,
Must cease for ever when the poor shall cease.
Flavia, most tender of her own good name,
Is rather careless of her sister's fame:
Her superfluity the poor supplies,
But if she touch a character, it dies.
The seeming virtue weighed against the vice,
She deems all safe, for she has paid the price:
No Charity but alms aught values she,
Except in porcelain on her mantle-tree.
How many deeds with which the world has rung,
From pride in league with ignorance, have sprung!
But God o'errules all human follies still,
And bends the tough materials to his will.
A conflagration, or a wintry flood,
Has left some hundreds without home or food:

Extravagance and Avarice shall subscribe,
While Fame and Self-complacence are the bribe.
The brief proclaimed, it visits every pew,
But first the squire's, a compliment but due;
With slow deliberation he unties
His glittering purse, that envy of all eyes,
And while the clerk just puzzles out the psalm,
Slides guinea behind guinea in his palm,
Till finding, what he might have found before,
A smaller piece amidst the precious store,
Pinched close between his finger and his thumb,
He half exhibits, and then drops the sum.
Gold, to be sure!—Throughout the town 'tis told,
How the good squire gives never less than gold.
From motives such as his, though not the best,
Springs in due time supply for the distressed;
Not less effectual than what Love bestows,
Except that Office clips it as it goes.
But lest I seem to sin against a friend,
And wound the grace I mean to recommend,
(Though Vice derided with a just design
Implies no trespass against Love Divine)
Once more I would adopt the graver style,
A teacher should be sparing of his smile.
Unless a love of virtue light the flame,
Satire is, more than those he brands, to blame;
He hides behind a magisterial air
His own offences, and strips others bare;
Affects indeed a most humane concern,
That men, if gently tutored, will not learn,
That mulish folly, not to be reclaimed
By softer methods, must be made ashamed,

But (I might instance in St. Patrick's dean*)
Too often rails to gratify his spleen.
Most satirists are indeed a public scourge;
Their mildest physic is a farrier's purge;
Their acrid temper turns, as soon as stirred,
The milk of their good purpose all to curd.
Their zeal begotten, as their works rehearse,
By lean despair upon an empty purse,
The wild assassins start into the street,
Prepared to poniard whomsoe'er they meet.
No skill in swordmanship, however just,
Can be secure against a madman's thrust,
And even Virtue, so unfairly matched,
Although immortal, may be pricked or scratched.
When Scandal has new minted an old lie,
Or taxed Invention for a fresh supply,
'Tis called a satire, and the World appears
Gathering around it, with erected ears:
A thousand names are tossed into the crowd,
Some whispered softly, and some twanged aloud,
Just as the sapience of an author's brain
Suggests it safe, or dangerous, to be plain.
Strange! how the frequent interjected dash
Quickens a market, and helps off the trash;
The important letters that include the rest,
Serve as a key to those that are suppressed;
Conjecture gripes the victims in his paw,
The world is charmed, and Scrib escapes the law.
So, when the cold damp shades of night prevail,
Worms may be caught by either head or tail,
Forcibly drawn from many a close recess,

* Swift; many of whose writings were not at all to Cowper's taste.

They meet with little pity, no redress;
Plunged in the stream, they lodge upon the mud,
Food for the famished rovers of the flood.
All zeal for a Reform that gives offence
To Peace and Charity, is mere pretence;—
A bold remark, but which, if well applied,
Would humble many a towering poet's pride.
Perhaps the man was in a sportive fit,
And had no other play-place for his wit;
Perhaps, enchanted with the love of fame,
He sought the jewel in his neighbour's shame;
Perhaps—whatever end he might pursue,
The cause of Virtue could not be his view.
At every stroke Wit flashes in our eyes,
The turns are quick, the polished points surprise,
But shine with cruel and tremendous charms,
That, while they please, possess us with alarms;
So have I seen (and hastened to the sight
On all the wings of holiday delight)
Where stands that monument of ancient power,
Named with emphatic dignity, "The Tower,"
Guns, halberts, swords and pistols, great and small,
In starry forms disposed upon the wall:
We wonder, as we gazing stand below,
That brass and steel should make so fine a show;
But though we praise the exact designer's skill,
Account them implements of mischief still.
No works shall find acceptance, in that day
When all disguises shall be rent away,
That square not truly with the scripture plan,
Nor spring from love to God, or love to man.
As He ordains things sordid in their birth
To be resolved into their parent earth,

And though the soul shall seek superior orbs,
Whate'er this world produces, it absorbs,
So Self starts nothing, but what tends apace
Home to the goal where it began the race.
Such as our motive is our aim must be,
If this be servile, that can ne'er be free:
If Self employ us, whatsoe'er is wrought,
We glorify that Self, not him we ought;
Such virtues had need prove their own reward,
The Judge of all men owes them no regard.
  True Charity, a plant divinely nursed,
Fed by the Love from which it rose at first,
Thrives against Hope, and in the rudest scene,
Storms but enliven its unfading green;
Exuberant is the shadow it supplies,
Its fruit on earth, its growth above the skies.
To look at him who formed us and redeemed,
So glorious now, though once so disesteemed;
To see a God stretch forth his human hand,
To uphold the boundless scenes of his command;
To recollect that in a form like ours,
He bruised beneath his feet the infernal powers,
Captivity led captive, rose to claim
The wreath He won so dearly in our name;
That throned above all height He condescends
To call the few that trust in him his friends;
That in the heaven of heavens, that space He deems
Too scanty for the exertion of his beams,
And shines as if impatient to bestow
Life and a kingdom upon worms below;
That sight imparts a never-dying flame,
Though feeble in degree, in kind the same.
Like him, the soul, thus kindled from above,

Spreads wide her arms of universal love,
And still enlarged as she receives the grace,
Includes creation in her close embrace.
Behold a Christian!—and without the fires
The founder of that name alone inspires,
Though all accomplishments,* all knowledge meet,
To make the shining prodigy complete,
Whoever boasts that name—behold a cheat!

Were Love, in these the world's last doting years,
As frequent as the want of it appears,
The churches warmed, they would no longer hold
Such frozen figures, stiff as they are cold;
Relenting forms would lose their power, or cease,
And e'en the dipped and sprinkled live in peace:
Each heart would quit its prison in the breast,
And flow in free communion with the rest.
The statesman, skilled in projects dark and deep,
Might burn his useless Machiavel,† and sleep;
His Budget, often filled, yet always poor,
Might swing at ease behind his study door,
No longer prey upon our annual rents,
Or scare the nation with its big contents:
Disbanded legions freely might depart,
And slaying man would cease to be an art.
No learned disputants would take the field,
Sure not to conquer, and sure not to yield;

* "Accomplishments;" Eds. 1782, 1786, Southey. "Accomplishment;" Ed. 1787, and subsequent editions, except that of Southey.

† "The Prince" of Machiavelli is, of course, the work referred to by Cowper, and he expresses the general opinion with respect to it. It has been doubted whether that opinion be altogether just; but all that Machiavelli's defenders say, in his behalf, is that his teaching was in accordance with the state of manners and morals in Italy when he wrote.

Both sides deceived, if rightly understood,
Pelting each other for the public good.
Did Charity prevail, the press would prove
A vehicle of virtue, truth, and love,
And I might spare myself the pains to show
What few can learn, and all suppose they know.
  Thus have I sought to grace a serious lay
With many a wild, indeed, but flowery spray,
In hopes to gain, what else I must have lost,
The attention Pleasure has so much engrossed.
But if, unhappily deceived, I dream,
And prove too weak for so divine a theme,
Let Charity forgive me a mistake,
That Zeal, not Vanity, has chanced to make,
And spare the poet for his subject' sake.

CONVERSATION.*

Nam neque me tantum venientis sibilus austri,
Nec percussa juvant fluctû tam litora, nec quæ
Saxosas inter decurrunt flumina valles.
VIRG. *Ecl.* v. 81.

THOUGH Nature weigh our talents, and dispense
To every man his modicum of sense,
And Conversation, in its better part,
May be esteemed a gift, and not an art,

Included, with the preceding poems, in the volume published Lond. 1782, 8vo. It was written in July and August, 1781, and was originally designed to be the introductory poem to a second volume. See Letter of Cowper to Newton, 22 July, 1781, and to Mrs. Newton, August, 1781.

Yet much depends, as in the tiller's toil,
On culture, and the sowing of the soil.
Words learned by rote a parrot may rehearse,
But talking is not always to converse;
Not more distinct from harmony divine
The constant creaking of a country sign.
As alphabets in ivory employ,
Hour after hour, the yet unlettered boy,
Sorting and puzzling with a deal of glee
Those seeds of science called his A B C;
So language in the mouths of the adult,
Witness its insignificant result,
Too often proves an implement of play,
A toy to sport with, and pass time away.
Collect at evening what the day brought forth,
Compress the sum into its solid worth,
And if it weigh the importance of a fly,
The scales are false, or algebra a lie.
Sacred interpreter of human thought,
How few respect, or use thee, as they ought!
But all shall give account of every wrong,
Who dare dishonour, or defile, the tongue;
Who prostitute it in the cause of vice,
Or sell their glory at a market price;
Who vote for hire, or point it with lampoon,
The dear-bought placeman, and the cheap buffoon.

There is a prurience in the speech of some,
Wrath stays him, or else God would strike them dumb:
His wise forbearance has their end in view,
They fill their measure, and receive their due.
The heathen lawgivers of ancient days,
Names almost worthy of a Christian's* praise,

"Christian;" Eds. 1782, 1786, 1787, Southey. "Christian's;" Ed. 1788, and subsequent editions, except Southey's.

Would drive them forth from the resort of men,
And shut up every satyr in his den.
Oh come not ye near innocence and truth,
Ye worms that eat into the bud of youth!
Infectious as impure, your blighting power
Taints in its rudiments the promised flower;
Its odour perished, and its charming hue,
Thenceforth 'tis hateful, for it smells of you.
Not e'en the vigorous and headlong rage
Of adolescence, or a firmer age,
Affords a plea allowable, or just,
For making speech the pamperer of lust;
But when the breath of age commits the fault,
'Tis nauseous as the vapour of a vault.
So withered stumps disgrace the sylvan scene,
No longer fruitful, and no longer green;
The sapless wood, divested of the bark,
Grows fungous, and takes fire at every spark.
Oaths terminate, as Paul observes, all strife—
Some men have surely then a peaceful life!
Whatever subject occupy discourse,
The feats of Vestris,* or the naval force,
Asseveration blustering in your face
Makes contradiction such a hopeless case;
In every tale they tell, or false or true,

For more than a century the family of Vestris was never without a representative of eminent talent among performers in opera or ballet. The one here alluded to is said to have been the second *Dieu de la Danse*, a strange title, given in Paris, first to Dupré, and, after his retirement, to G. A. B. Vestris, born in Florence in 1729. He maintained his supremacy until 1781. In that year he took a formal farewell of the scene of his many triumphs. His son M. A. Vestris succeeded and perhaps excelled him.

Well known, or such as no man ever knew,
They fix attention, heedless of your pain,
With oaths like rivets forced into the brain,
And e'en when sober truth prevails throughout,
They swear it, till affirmance breeds a doubt.
A Persian, humble servant of the sun,
Who though devout, yet bigotry had none,
Hearing a lawyer, grave in his address,
With adjurations every word impress,
Supposed the man a bishop, or at least,
God's name so much upon his lips, a priest;
Bowed at the close with all his graceful airs,
And begged an interest in his frequent prayers
Go, quit the rank to which ye stood preferred,
Henceforth associate in one common herd;
Religion, Virtue, Reason, Common Sense,
Pronounce your human form a false pretence,
A mere disguise, in which a devil lurks,
Who yet betrays his secret by his works.
Ye powers who rule the tongue, if such there are,
And make colloquial happiness your care,
Preserve me from the thing I dread and hate,
A duel in the form of a debate.
The clash of arguments and jar of words,
Worse than the mortal brunt of rival swords,
Decide no question with their tedious length,
(For opposition gives opinion strength)
Divert the champions prodigal of breath,

It has been thought that Erskine, in his defence of Lord George Gordon, was the first to profane the sacred name by its introduction, in the way of oath, into a forensic address; but this passage, coupled with a previous one in *Expostulation* (lines 660 to 665), seems to prove that such adjuration was a common vice of the day.

And put the peaceably-disposed to death.
Oh! thwart me not, Sir Soph, at every turn,
Nor carp at every flaw you may discern;
Though syllogisms hang not on my tongue,
I am not surely always in the wrong;
'Tis hard if all is false that I advance,
A fool must now and then be right by chance.
Not that all freedom of dissent I blame;
No!—there I grant the privilege I claim.
A disputable point is no man's ground,
Rove where you please, 'tis common all around.
Discourse may want an animated—No,
To brush the surface, and to make it flow;
But still remember, if you mean to please,
To press your point with modesty and ease.
The mark at which my juster aim I take,
Is contradiction for its own dear sake;
Set your opinion at whatever pitch,
Knots and impediments make something hitch;
Adopt his own, 'tis equally in vain,
Your thread of argument is snapped again;
The wrangler, rather than accord with you,
Will judge himself deceived, and prove it too.
Vociferated logic kills me quite,
A noisy man is always in the right;
I twirl my thumbs, fall back into my chair,
Fix on the wainscoat a distressful stare,
And when I hope his blunders are all out,
Reply discreetly—"To be sure—no doubt!"
DUBIUS is such a scrupulous good man—
Yes—you may catch him tripping, if you can.
He would not, with a peremptory tone,
Assert the nose upon his face his own;

With hesitation admirably slow,
He humbly hopes—presumes—it may be so.
His evidence, if he were called by law,
To swear to some enormity he saw,
For want of prominence and just relief,
Would hang an honest man, and save a thief.
Through constant dread of giving Truth offence,
He ties up all his hearers in suspense,
Knows what he knows, as if he knew it not,
What he remembers seems to have forgot,
His sole opinion, whatsoe'er befall,
Centering at last in having none at all.
Yet, though he tease and baulk your listening ear,
He makes one useful point exceeding clear;
Howe'er ingenious on his darling theme
A sceptic in philosophy may seem,
Reduced to practice, his beloved rule
Would only prove him a consummate fool;
Useless in him alike both brain and speech,
Fate having placed all truth above his reach,
His ambiguities his total sum,
He might as well be blind, and deaf, and dumb.
Where men of judgment creep, and feel their way,
The positive pronounce without dismay,
Their want of light and intellect supplied
By sparks Absurdity strikes out of Pride;
Without the means of knowing right from wrong,
They always are decisive, clear, and strong.
Where others toil with philosophic force,
Their nimble nonsense takes a shorter course,
Flings at your head conviction in the lump,
And gains remote conclusions at a jump;
Their own defect, invisible to them,

Seen in another they at once condemn,
And though self-idolized in every case,
Hate their own likeness in a brother's face.
The cause is plain, and not to be denied,
The proud are always most provoked by pride;
Few competitions but engender spite,
And those the most, where neither has a right.
The Point of Honour has been deemed of use,
To teach good manners, and to curb abuse:
Admit it true, the consequence is clear,
Our polished manners are a mask we wear,
And at the bottom barbarous still and rude,
We are restrained indeed, but not subdued.
The very remedy, however sure,
Springs from the mischief it intends to cure,
And savage in its principle appears,
Tried, as it should be, by the fruit it bears.
'Tis hard, indeed, if nothing will defend
Mankind from quarrels, but their fatal end;
That now and then a hero must decease,
That the surviving world may live in peace.
Perhaps at last close scrutiny may show
The practice dastardly, and mean, and low,
That men engage in it impelled by force,
And fear, not courage, is its proper source;
The fear of tyrant custom, and the fear
Lest fops should censure us, and fools should sneer.
At least to trample on our Maker's laws,
And hazard life for any or no cause,
To rush into a fixed eternal state,
Out of the very flames of rage and hate,
Or send another shivering to the bar,
With all the guilt of such unnatural war,

Whatever Use may urge, or Honour plead,
On Reason's verdict is a madman's deed.
Am I to set my life upon a throw,
Because a bear is rude and surly? No—
A moral, sensible, and well bred man
Will not affront me, and no other can.
Were I empowered to regulate the lists,
They should encounter with well loaded fists;
A Trojan combat would be something new,
Let Dares beat Entellus* black and blue,
Then each might show, to his admiring friends,
In honourable bumps his rich amends,
And carry, in contusions of his skull,
A satisfactory receipt in full.
A story in which native humour reigns,
Is often useful, always entertains;
A graver fact, enlisted on your side,
May furnish illustration, well applied;
But sedentary weavers of long tales
Give me the fidgets, and my patience fails.
'Tis the most asinine employ on earth,
To hear them tell of parentage and birth,
And echo conversations dull and dry,
Embellished with—"He said," and, "So said I."
At every interview their route the same,
The repetition makes attention lame,
We bustle up with unsuccessful speed,
And in the saddest part cry—"Droll indeed!"
The path of narrative with care pursue,
Still making probability your clue;

Dares and Entellus, it will be remembered, were the *athletæ* whose contest is described in the Fifth Book of the *Æneid*.

On all the vestiges of truth attend,
And let them guide you to a decent end.
Of all ambitions man may entertain,
The worst that can invade a sickly brain
Is that which angles hourly for surprise,
And baits its hook with prodigies and lies.
Credulous infancy, or age as weak,
Are fittest auditors for such to seek,
Who to please others will themselves disgrace,
Yet please not, but affront you to your face.
A great retailer of this curious ware,
Having unloaded and made many stare,
"Can this be true?"—an arch observer cries;
"Yes" (rather moved) "I saw it with these eyes!"
"Sir! I believe it on that ground alone;
I could not, had I seen it with my own."
A tale should be judicious, clear, succinct,
The language plain, and incidents well linked;
Tell not as new what every body knows,
And new or old, still hasten to a close,
There centering in a focus round and neat,
Let all your rays of information meet:
What neither yields us profit nor delight,
Is like a nurse's lullaby at night;
Guy Earl of Warwick and fair Eleanore,
Or giant-killing Jack, would please me more.
The pipe, with solemn interposing puff,
Makes half a sentence at a time enough;
The dozing sages drop the drowsy strain,
Then pause and puff—and speak, and pause again.
Such often, like the tube they so admire,
Important triflers!* have more smoke than fire.

* "Trifles;" Eds. 1782, 1786, 1787. "Triflers;" Ed. 1788, and subsequent editions.

Pernicious weed! whose scent the fair annoys,
Unfriendly to society's chief joys,
Thy worst effect is banishing for hours
The sex whose presence civilizes ours;
Thou art indeed the drug a gardener wants,
To poison vermin that infest his plants,
But are we so to wit and beauty blind,
As to despise the glory of our kind,
And show the softest minds and fairest forms
As little mercy as he grubs and worms?
They dare not wait the riotous abuse
Thy thirst-creating steams at length produce,
When wine has given indecent language birth,
And forced the floodgates of licentious mirth;
For sea-born Venus her attachment shows
Still to that element from which she rose,
And with a quiet, which no fumes disturb,
Sips meek infusions of a milder herb.
The emphatic speaker dearly loves to oppose,
In contact inconvenient, nose to nose,
As if the gnomon on his neighbour's phiz,
Touched with the magnet, had attracted his.
His whispered theme, dilated and at large,
Proves after all a wind-gun's airy charge,
An extract of his diary,—no more,
A tasteless journal of the day before.
He walked abroad, o'ertaken in the rain,
Called on a friend, drank tea, stepped home again,
Resumed his purpose, had a world of talk
With one he stumbled on, and lost his walk.
I interrupt him with a sudden bow,
"Adieu, dear Sir! lest you should lose it now."
I cannot talk with civet in the room,

A fine puss-gentleman that's all perfume;
The sight's enough—no need to smell a beau—
Who thrusts his nose into a raree-show?
His odoriferous attempts to please
Perhaps might prosper with a swarm of bees;
But we that make no honey, though we sting,
Poets, are sometimes apt to maul the thing.
'Tis wrong to bring into a mixed resort,
What makes some sick, and others *à-la-mort*,
An argument of cogence, we may say,
Why such a one should keep himself away.
A graver coxcomb we may sometimes see,
Quite as absurd, though not so light, as he;
A shallow brain behind a serious mask,
An oracle within an empty cask;
The solemn fop, significant and budge,
A fool with judges, amongst fools a judge.
He says but little, and that little said
Owes all its weight, like loaded dice, to lead.
His wit invites you by his looks to come,
But when you knock, it never is at home:
'Tis like a parcel sent you by the stage,
Some handsome present, as your hopes presage,
'Tis heavy, bulky, and bids fair to prove
An absent friend's fidelity and love,
But when unpacked your disappointment groans,
To find it stuffed with brickbats, earth, and stones.
Some men employ their health, an ugly trick,
In making known how oft they have been sick,
And give us, in recitals of disease,
A doctor's trouble, but without the fees;
Relate how many weeks they kept their bed,
How an emetic or cathartic sped;

Nothing is slightly touched, much less forgot,
Nose, ears, and eyes seem present on the spot.
Now the distemper, spite of draught or pill,
Victorious seemed, and now the doctor's skill;
And now—alas, for unforeseen mishaps!
They put on a damp nightcap, and relapse;
They thought they must have died, they were so bad;
Their peevish hearers almost wish they had.
Some fretful tempers wince at every touch,
You always do too little or too much;
You speak with life, in hopes to entertain,
Your elevated voice goes through the brain;
You fall at once into a lower key,
That's worse—the drone-pipe of an humblebee;
The southern sash admits too strong a light,
You rise and drop the curtain—now 'tis night;
He shakes with cold—you stir the fire and strive
To make a blaze—that's roasting him alive;
Serve him with venison, and he chooses fish,
With sole—that's just the sort he would not wish,
He takes what he at first professed to loathe,
And in due time feeds heartily on both;
Yet still, o'erclouded with a constant frown,
He does not swallow, but he gulps it down;
Your hope to please him vain on every plan,
Himself should work that wonder if he can—
Alas! his efforts double his distress,
He likes yours little, and his own still less;
Thus always teasing others, always teased,
His only pleasure is to be displeased.
I pity bashful men, who feel the pain
Of fancied scorn and undeserved disdain,
And bear the marks upon a blushing face

Of needless shame, and self-imposed disgrace.
Our sensibilities are so acute,
The fear of being silent makes us mute.
We sometimes think we could a speech produce
Much to the purpose, if our tongues were loose,
But being tied,* it dies upon the lip,
Faint as a chicken's note that has the pip;
Our wasted oil unprofitably burns,
Like hidden lamps in old sepulchral urns.†
Few Frenchmen of this evil have complained;
It seems as if we Britons were ordained,
By way of wholesome curb upon our pride,
To fear each other, fearing none beside.
The cause perhaps inquiry may descry,
Self-searching with an introverted eye,
Concealed within an unsuspected part,
The vainest corner of our own vain heart;
For ever aiming at the world's esteem,
Our self-importance ruins its own scheme;
In other eyes our talents rarely shown,
Become at length so splendid in our own,
We dare not risk them into public view,
Lest they miscarry of what seems their due.

* "Tied;" Eds. 1782, 1786, 1787, 1788, 1825, and Southey. "Tried;" Ed. 1793, and subsequent editions, except those above mentioned.

† It was at one time believed that the ancients possessed the power of constructing lamps which, once lighted, would burn, some said, for a thousand years, others for ever, and that the lamps found in sepulchres were of that character. Such lamps were consequently subjects of great curiosity and of much investigation. Perpetual light ranked as a subject of inquiry with perpetual motion, and enthusiasts toiled after its discovery as they did after the secrets of alchemy and the *elixir vitæ*.

True Modesty is a discerning grace,
And only blushes in the proper place;
But counterfeit is blind, and skulks through fear,
Where 'tis a shame to be ashamed to appear;
Humility the parent of the first,
The last by Vanity produced and nursed.
The circle formed, we sit in silent state,
Like figures drawn upon a dial plate;
"Yes, ma'am," and "No, ma'am," uttered softly, show
Every five minutes how the minutes go;
Each individual, suffering a constraint,
Poetry may, but colours cannot paint,
As if in close committee on the sky,
Reports it hot or cold, or wet or dry,
And finds a changing clime a happy source
Of wise reflection and well timed discourse.
We next inquire, but softly and by stealth,
Like conservators of the public health,
Of epidemic throats, if such there are,
And coughs, and rheums, and phthisic, and catarrh.
That theme exhausted, a wide chasm ensues,
Filled up at last with interesting news;
Who danced with whom, and who are like to wed,
And who is hanged, and who is brought to bed;
But fear to call a more important cause,
As if 'twere treason against English laws.
The visit paid, with ecstasy we come,
As from a seven years' transportation, home,
And there resume an unembarrassed brow,
Recovering what we lost we know not how,
The faculties that seemed reduced to naught,
Expression and the privilege of thought.

The reeking, roaring hero of the chase,
I give him over as a desperate case.
Physicians write in hopes to work a cure,
Never, if honest ones, when death is sure;
And though the fox he follows may be tamed,
A mere fox-follower never is reclaimed.
Some farrier should prescribe his proper course,
Whose only fit companion is his horse,
Or if, deserving of a better doom,
The noble beast judge otherwise, his groom.
Yet e'en the rogue that serves him, though he stand
To take his honour's orders, cap in hand,
Prefers his fellow grooms, with much good sense,
Their skill a truth, his master's a pretence.
If neither horse nor groom affect the squire,
Where can at last his jockeyship retire?
Oh! to the club, the scene of savage joys,
The school of coarse good fellowship and noise;
There, in the sweet society of those
Whose friendship from his boyish years he chose,
Let him improve his talent if he can,
Till none but beasts acknowledge him a man.
Man's heart had been impenetrably sealed,
Like theirs that cleave the flood or graze the field,
Had not his Maker's all-bestowing hand
Given him a soul, and bade him understand.
The reasoning power vouchsafed of course inferred
The power to clothe that reason with his word;
For all is perfect that God works on earth,
And He that gives conception aids* the birth.
If this be plain, 'tis plainly understood,

* "Adds;" Eds. 1782, 1786, Southey. "Aids;" Ed. 1787, and subsequent editions, except Southey's.

What uses of his boon the giver would.
The Mind despatched upon her busy toil,
Should range where Providence has blessed the soil;
Visiting every flower with labour meet,
And gathering all her treasures, sweet by sweet,
She should imbue the tongue with what she sips,
And shed the balmy blessing on the lips,
That good diffused may more abundant grow,
And speech may praise the power that bids it flow.
Will the sweet warbler of the livelong night,
That fills the listening lover with delight,
Forget his harmony, with rapture heard,
To learn the twittering of a meaner bird?
Or make the parrot's mimicry his choice,
That odious libel on a human voice?
No—Nature, unsophisticate by man,
Starts not aside from her Creator's plan;
The melody that was at first designed
To cheer the rude forefathers of mankind,
Is note for note delivered in our ears,
In the last scene of her six thousand years.
Yet Fashion, leader of a chattering train,
Whom man, for his own hurt, permits to reign,
Who shifts and changes all things but his shape,
And would degrade her votary to an ape,
The fruitful parent of abuse and wrong,
Holds a usurped dominion o'er his tongue;
There sits and prompts him with his own disgrace,
Prescribes the theme, the tone, and the grimace,
And when accomplished in her wayward school,
Calls gentleman whom she has made a fool.
'Tis an unalterable fixed decree,
That none could frame or ratify but she,

That Heaven and Hell, and righteousness and sin;
Snares in his path, and foes that lurk within,
God and his attributes (a field of day
Where 'tis an angel's happiness to stray),
Fruits of his love and wonders of his might,
Be never named in ears esteemed polite.
That he who dares, when she forbids, be grave,
Shall stand proscribed, a madman or a knave,
A close designer not to be believed,
Or, if excused that charge, at least deceived.
O folly worthy of the nurse's lap,
Give it the breast, or stop its mouth with pap!
Is it incredible, or can it seem
A dream to any except those that dream,
That man should love his Maker, and *that* fire,
Warming his heart, should at his lips transpire?
Know then, and modestly let fall your eyes,
And veil your daring crest that braves the skies,
That air of insolence affronts your God,
You need his pardon, and provoke his rod:
Now, in a posture that becomes you more
Than that heroic strut assumed before,
Know, your arrears with every hour accrue
For mercy shown, while wrath is justly due.
The time is short, and there are souls on earth,
Though future pain may serve for present mirth,
Acquainted with the woes that fear or shame,
By Fashion taught, forbade them once to name,
And having felt the pangs you deem a jest,
Have proved them truths too big to be expressed.
Go seek on Revelation's hallowed ground,
Sure to succeed, the remedy they found;
Touched by that power that you have dared to mock.

That makes seas stable, and dissolves the rock,
Your heart shall yield a life-renewing stream,
That fools, as you have done, shall call a dream.
It happened on a solemn eventide,
Soon after He that was our surety died,
Two bosom friends, each pensively inclined,
The scene of all those sorrows left behind,
Sought their own village, busied as they went
In musings worthy of the great event:
They spake of him they loved, of him whose life,
Though blameless, had incurred perpetual strife,
Whose deeds had left, in spite of hostile arts,
A deep memorial graven on their hearts.
The recollection, like a vein of ore,
The farther traced, enriched them still the more;
They thought him, and they justly thought him, one
Sent to do more than He appeared to have done;
To exalt a people, and to place them high
Above all else, and wondered He should die.
Ere yet they brought their journey to an end,
A stranger joined them, courteous as a friend,
And asked them, with a kind, engaging air,
What their affliction was, and begged a share.
Informed, He gathered up the broken thread,
And, Truth and Wisdom gracing all He said,
Explained, illustrated, and searched so well
The tender theme on which they chose to dwell,
That reaching home, "The night," they said, "is near,
We must not now be parted, sojourn here."
The new acquaintance soon became a guest,
And made so welcome at their simple feast,
He blessed the bread, but vanished at the word,

And left them both exclaiming, "'Twas the Lord!
Did not our hearts feel all He deigned to say,
Did they not burn within us by the way?"
Now theirs was converse such as it behoves
Man to maintain, and such as God approves:
Their views, indeed, were indistinct and dim,
But yet successful, being aimed at him.
Christ and his character their only scope,
Their object, and their subject, and their hope,
They felt what it became them much to feel,
And wanting him to loose the sacred seal,
Found him as prompt, as their desire was true,
To spread the newborn glories in their view.
Well—what are ages, and the lapse of time,
Matched against truths as lasting as sublime?
Can length of years on God himself exact,
Or make that fiction which was once a fact?
No; marble and recording brass decay,
And, like the graver's memory, pass away;
The works of man inherit, as is just,
Their author's frailty, and return to dust;
But Truth divine for ever stands secure,
Its head as* guarded as its base is sure;
Fixed in the rolling flood of endless years,
The pillar of the eternal plan appears,
The raving storm and dashing wave defies,
Built by that architect who built the skies.
Hearts may be found that harbour at this hour
That love of Christ in† all its quickening power,

* "As;" Eds. 1782, 1786, 1787, 1788, Southey. "Is;" Ed. 1793 and subsequent editions, except Southey's.

† "In;" Eds. 1782, 1786, 1787, 1788, 1793, 1794, 1798, 1799, Southey, Dale, Bell. "And;" Ed. 1800, and subsequent editions, except those above mentioned.

And lips unstained by folly or by strife,
Whose wisdom, drawn from the deep well of life,
Tastes of its healthful origin, and flows
A Jordan for the ablution of our woes.
O days of heaven, and nights of equal praise!
Serene and peaceful as those heavenly days,
When souls drawn upwards* in communion sweet
Enjoy the stillness of some close retreat,
Discourse, as if released and safe at home,
Of dangers past, and wonders yet to come,
And spread the sacred treasures of the breast
Upon the lap of covenanted rest.

"What, always dreaming over heavenly things,
Like angel-heads in stone with pigeon wings?
Canting and whining out all day the word,
And half the night? fanatic and absurd!
Mine be the friend less frequent in his prayers,
Who makes no bustle with his soul's affairs,
Whose wit can brighten up a wintry day,
And chase the splenetic dull hours away.
Content on earth in earthly things to shine,
Who waits for heaven ere he becomes divine,
Leaves saints to enjoy those altitudes they teach,
And plucks the fruit placed more within his reach."

Well spoken, advocate of sin and shame,
Known by thy bleating, Ignorance thy name.
Is sparkling wit the world's exclusive right,
The fixed fee-simple of the vain and light?
Can hopes of Heaven, bright prospects of an hour
That comes† to waft us out of sorrow's power,

* "Upward;" Eds. 1782, 1786, 1787, Southey. "Upwards;" Ed. 1788, and subsequent editions, except Southey's.
† "Come;" Ed. 1782, but corrected in the errata to

Obscure or quench a faculty that finds
Its happiest soil in the serenest minds?
Religion curbs indeed its wanton play,
And brings the trifler under rigorous sway,
But gives it usefulness unknown before,
And purifying, makes it shine the more.
A Christian's wit is inoffensive light,
A beam that aids, but never grieves the sight,
Vigorous in age as in the flush of youth,
'Tis always active on the side of Truth;
Temperance and Peace insure its healthful state,
And make it brightest at its latest date.
Oh! I have seen (nor hope perhaps in vain,
Ere life go down, to see such sights again)
A veteran warrior in the christian field,
Who never saw the sword he could not wield;
Grave without dulness, learned without pride,
Exact yet not precise, though meek keen-eyed;
A man that would have foiled at their own play
A dozen would-bes of the modern day;
Who when occasion justified its use,
Had wit as bright as ready to produce,
Could fetch from records of an earlier age,
Or from philosophy's enlightened page,
His rich materials, and regale your ear
With strains it was a privilege to hear:
Yet above all, his luxury supreme,
And his chief glory, was the gospel theme;
There he was copious as old Greece or Rome,
His happy eloquence seemed there at home,

"comes." "Comes;" Eds. 1786, 1787, Southey, Bell. "Come;" Eds. 1788, 1793, 1794, and subsequent editions until Southey's.

Ambitious, not to shine or to excel,
But to treat justly what he loved so well.
It moves me more perhaps than Folly ought,
When some green heads, as void of wit as thought,
Suppose themselves monopolists of sense,
And wiser men's ability, pretence.
Though Time will wear us, and we must grow old,
Such men are not forgot as soon as cold,
Their fragrant memory will outlast their tomb,
Embalmed for ever in its own perfume.
And to say truth, though in its early prime,
And when unstained with any grosser crime,
Youth has a sprightliness and fire to boast,
That in the valley of decline are lost,
And Virtue with peculiar charms appears,
Crowned with the garland of life's blooming years;
Yet Age, by long experience well informed,
Well read, well tempered, with religion warmed,
That fire abated which impels rash youth,
Proud of his speed, to overshoot the truth,
As Time improves the grape's authentic juice,
Mellows and makes the speech more fit for use,
And claims a reverence in its shortening day,
That 'tis an honour and a joy to pay.
The fruits of age, less fair, are yet more sound,
Than those a brighter season pours around,
And like the stores autumnal suns mature,
Through wintry rigours unimpaired endure.
What is fanatic frenzy, scorned so much,
And dreaded more than a contagious touch?
I grant it dangerous, and approve your fear,
That fire is catching if you draw too near;
But sage observers oft mistake the flame,

And give true piety that odious name.
To tremble (as the creature of an hour
Ought at the view of an Almighty power)
Before his presence, at whose awful throne
All tremble in all worlds, except our own;
To supplicate his mercy, love his ways,
And prize them above pleasure, wealth, or praise;
Though common sense, allowed a casting voice,
And free from bias, must approve the choice,
Convicts a man fanatic in the extreme,
And wild as madness in the world's esteem.
But that disease, when soberly defined,
Is the false fire of an o'erheated mind;
It views the truth with a distorted eye,
And either warps or lays it useless by;
'Tis narrow, selfish, arrogant, and draws
Its sordid nourishment from man's applause,
And while at heart sin unrelinquished lies,
Presumes itself chief favourite of the skies,
'Tis such a light as putrefaction breeds
In fly-blown flesh, whereon the maggot feeds,
Shines in the dark, but ushered into day,
The stench remains, the lustre dies away.
  True bliss, if man may reach it, is composed
Of hearts in union mutually disclosed;
And, farewell else all hope of pure delight,
Those hearts should be reclaimed, renewed, upright.
Bad men, profaning friendship's hallowed name,
Form, in its stead, a covenant of shame,
A dark confederacy against the laws
Of virtue, and religion's glorious cause:
They build each other up with dreadful skill,
As bastions set point blank against God's will,

Enlarge and fortify the dread redoubt,
Deeply resolved to shut a Saviour out;
Call legions up from Hell to back the deed,
And, cursed with conquest, finally succeed.
But souls that carry on a blest exchange
Of joys they meet with in their heavenly range,
And, with a fearless confidence, make known
The sorrows Sympathy esteems its own,
Daily derive increasing light and force
From such communion in their pleasant course,
Feel less the journey's roughness and its length,
Meet their opposers with united strength,
And one in heart, in interest, and design,
Gird up each other to the race divine.

But Conversation, choose what theme we may,
And chiefly when Religion leads the way,
Should flow like waters after summer showers,
Not as if raised by mere mechanic powers.
The Christian, in whose soul, though now distressed,
Lives the dear thought of joys he once possessed,
When all his glowing language issued forth
With God's deep stamp upon its current worth,
Will speak without disguise, and must impart,
Sad as it is, his undissembling heart,
Abhors constraint, and dares not feign a zeal,
Or seem to boast a fire he does not feel.
The song of Sion is a tasteless thing,
Unless, when rising on a joyful wing,
The soul can mix with the celestial bands,
And give the strain the compass it demands.

Strange tidings these to tell a world who treat
All but their own experience as deceit!
Will they believe, though credulous enough

To swallow much upon much weaker proof,
That there are blest inhabitants of earth,
Partakers of a new ethereal birth,
Their hopes, desires, and purposes estranged,
From things terrestrial, and divinely changed;
Their very language of a kind that speaks
The soul's sure interest in the good she seeks;
Who deal with Scripture, its importance felt,
As Tully with philosophy once dealt,
And in the silent watches of the night,
And through the scenes of toil-renewing light,
The social walk, or solitary ride,
Keep still the dear companion at their side?
No—shame upon a self-disgracing age,
God's work may serve an ape upon a stage
With such a jest as filled with hellish glee
Certain invisibles as shrewd as he;
But veneration or respect finds none,
Save from the subjects of that work alone.
The World grown old her deep discernment shows,
Claps spectacles on her sagacious nose,
Peruses closely the true Christian's face,
And finds it a mere mask of sly grimace;
Usurps God's office, lays his bosom bare,
And finds Hypocrisy close lurking there;
And, serving God herself through mere constraint,
Concludes his unfeigned love of him, a feint.
And yet, God knows, look human nature through,
(And in due time the world shall know it too)
That since the flowers of Eden felt the blast,
That after man's defection laid all waste,
Sincerity towards the heart-searching God
Has made the new-born creature her abode,

Nor shall be found in unregenerate souls,
Till the last fire burn all between the poles.
Sincerity! why 'tis his only pride,
Weak and imperfect in all grace beside,
He knows that God demands his heart entire,
And gives him all his just demands require.
Without it, his pretensions were as vain,
As, having it, he deems the world's disdain;
That great defect would cost him, not alone
Man's favourable judgment, but his own;
His birthright shaken, and no longer clear,
Than while his conduct proves his heart sincere.
Retort the charge, and let the World be told
She boasts a confidence she does not hold;
That, conscious of her crimes, she feels instead
A cold misgiving, and a killing dread:
That, while in health, the ground of her support
Is madly to forget that life is short;
That sick, she trembles, knowing she must die,
Her hope presumption, and her faith a lie;
That while she dotes, and dreams that she believes,
She mocks her Maker, and herself deceives,
Her utmost reach, historical assent,
The doctrines warped to what they never meant;
That truth itself is in her head as dull
And useless as a candle in a skull,
And all her love of God a groundless claim,
A trick upon the canvass, *painted flame.*
Tell her again, the sneer upon her *face,*
And all her censures of the work of *grace,*
Are insincere, meant only to *conceal*
A dread she would not, yet is *forced to feel;*
That in her heart the Christian she reveres,

And while she seems to scorn him, only fears.
A poet does not work by square or line,
As smiths and joiners perfect a design;
At least we moderns, our attention less,
Beyond the example of our sires digress,
And claim a right to scamper and run wide,
Wherever chance, caprice, or fancy guide.
The world and I fortuitously met,
I owed a trifle, and have paid the debt;
She did me wrong, I recompensed the deed,
And having struck the balance, now proceed.
Perhaps, however, as some years have passed
Since she and I conversed together last,
And I have lived recluse in rural shades,
Which seldom a distinct report pervades,
Great changes and new manners have occurred,
And blest reforms that I have never heard,
And she may now be as discreet and wise,
As once absurd in all discerning eyes.
Sobriety perhaps may now be found
Where once intoxication pressed the ground;
The subtle and injurious may be just,
And he grown chaste that was the slave of lust;
Arts once esteemed may be with shame dismissed,
Charity may relax the miser's fist,
The gamester may have cast his cards away,
Forgot to curse, and only kneel to pray.
It has indeed been told me (with what weight,
How credibly, 'tis hard for me to state)
That fables old, that seemed for ever mute,
Revived, are hastening into fresh repute,
And gods and goddesses discarded long,
Like useless lumber, or a stroller's song,

Are bringing into vogue their heathen train,
And Jupiter bids fair to rule again;
That certain feasts are instituted now,*
Where Venus hears the lover's tender vow;
That all Olympus through the country roves,
To consecrate our few remaining groves,
And Echo learns politely to repeat
The praise of names for ages obsolete;
That having proved the weakness, it should seem,
Of Revelation's ineffectual beam,
To bring the passions under sober sway,
And give the moral springs their proper play,
They mean to try what may at last be done,
By stout substantial gods of wood and stone,
And whether Roman rites may not produce
The virtues of old Rome for English use.
May such success attend the pious plan,
May Mercury once more embellish man,
Grace him again with long forgotten arts,
Reclaim his taste, and brighten up his parts,
Make him athletic as in days of old,
Learned at the bar, in the *palæstra* bold,
Divest the rougher sex of female airs,
And teach the softer not to copy theirs.
The change shall please, nor shall it matter aught
Who works the wonder, if it be but wrought.
'Tis time, however, if the case stands thus,
For us plain folks, and all who side with us,
To build our altar, confident and bold,
And say as stern Elijah said of old,†

* The Medmenham revels of Sir Francis Dashwood and his companions are here alluded to. See Foundling Hospital of Wit, iii. 104.

† 1 Kings, xviii. 21.

"The strife now stands upon a fair award,
If Israel's Lord be God, then serve the Lord;
If he be silent, faith is all a whim,
Then Baal is the God, and worship him."
Digression is so much in modern use,
Thought is so rare, and fancy so profuse,
Some never seem so wide of their intent,
As when returning to the theme they meant;
As mendicants, whose business is to roam,
Make every parish but their own their home.
Though such continual zigzags in a book,
Such drunken reelings, have an awkward look,
And I had rather creep to what is true,
Than rove and stagger with no mark in view;
Yet to consult a little seemed no crime,
The freakish humour of the present time:
But now, to gather up what seems dispersed,
And touch the subject I designed at first,
May prove, though much beside the rules of art,
Best for the public, and my wisest part.
And first, let no man charge me, that I mean
To close in sable every social scene,
And give good company a face severe,
As if they met around a father's bier;
For tell some men that pleasure, all their bent,
And laughter, all their work, is life misspent,
Their wisdom bursts into this sage reply,
Then mirth is sin, and we should always cry.
To find the medium asks some share of wit,
And therefore 'tis a mark fools never hit.
But though life's valley be a vale of tears,
A brighter scene beyond that vale appears,
Whose glory, with a light that never fades,

Shoots between scattered rocks and opening shades,
And while it shows the land the soul desires,
The language of the land she seeks inspires.
Thus touched, the tongue receives a sacred cure
Of all that was absurd, profane, impure;
Held within modest bounds, the tide of speech
Pursues the course that truth and nature teach;
No longer labours merely to produce
The pomp of sound, or tinkle without use;
Where'er it winds, the salutary stream,
Sprightly and fresh, enriches every theme,
While all the happy man possessed before,
The gift of nature, or the classic store,
Is made subservient to the grand design
For which Heaven formed the faculty divine.
So should an idiot, while at large he strays,
Find the sweet lyre on which an artist plays,
With rash and awkward force the chords he shakes,
And grins with wonder at the jar he makes;
But let the wise and well instructed hand
Once take the shell beneath his just command,
In gentle sounds it seems as it complained
Of the rude injuries it late sustained,
Till tuned at length to some immortal song,
It sounds Jehovah's name, and pours his praise along.

RETIREMENT.*

. . . . . studiis florens ignobilis otî.
VIRG. *Geor.* Lib. iv. 564.

HACKNEYED in business, wearied at that† oar
Which thousands once fast chained to quit no more,
But which, when life at ebb runs weak and low,
All wish, or seem to wish, they could forego;
The statesman, lawyer, merchant, man of trade,
Pants for the refuge of some rural shade,
Where all his long anxieties forgot,
Amid the charms of a sequestered spot,
Or recollected only to gild o'er
And add a smile to what was sweet before,
He may possess the joys he thinks he sees,
Lay his old age upon the lap of Ease,
Improve the remnant of his wasted span,
And having lived a trifler, die a man.
Thus Conscience pleads her cause within the breast,
Though long rebelled against, not yet suppressed,
And calls a creature formed for God alone,

* The last of the longer pieces included in the volume of Poems, 1782, 8vo. It was written in August and September, 1781. See Letters to Unwin and Newton, 25 August, and 18 and 26 September, 1781.

† Southey has "the oar," for which there is no authority in any other Edition.

For Heaven's high purposes, and not his own,
Calls him away from selfish ends and aims,
From what debilitates and what inflames,
From cities humming with a restless crowd,
Sordid as active, ignorant as loud,
Whose highest praise is that they live in vain,
The dupes of pleasure, or the slaves of gain,
Where works of man are clustered close around,
And works of God are hardly to be found,
To regions where, in spite of sin and woe,
Traces of Eden are still seen below,
Where mountain, river, forest, field, and grove,
Remind him of his Maker's power and love.
'Tis well if, looked for at so late a day,
In the last scene of such a senseless play,
True Wisdom will attend his feeble call,
And grace his action ere the curtain fall.
Souls that have long despised their heavenly birth,
Their wishes all impregnated with earth,
For threescore years employed with ceaseless care
In catching smoke and feeding upon air,
Conversant only with the ways of men,
Rarely redeem the short remaining ten.
Inveterate habits choke the unfruitful heart,
Their fibres penetrate its tenderest part,
And draining its nutritious powers to feed
Their noxious growth, starve every better seed.
Happy, if full of days—but happier far,
If, ere we yet discern life's evening star,
Sick of the service of a world that feeds
Its patient drudges with dry chaff and weeds,
We can escape from Custom's idiot sway,
To serve the Sovereign we were born to obey.

Then sweet to muse upon his skill displayed
(Infinite skill) in all that He has made!
To trace in Nature's most minute design
The signature and stamp of power divine,
Contrivance intricate expressed with ease,
Where unassisted sight no beauty sees,
The shapely limb and lubricated joint,
Within the small dimensions of a point,
Muscle and nerve miraculously spun,
His mighty work, who speaks and it is done,
The Invisible in things scarce seen revealed,
To whom an atom is an ample field.
To wonder at a thousand insect forms,
These hatched, and those resuscitated worms,
New life ordained and brighter scenes to share,
Once prone on earth, now buoyant upon air,
Whose shape would make them, had they bulk and size,
More hideous foes than fancy can devise;
With helmet* heads, and dragon-scales adorned,
The mighty myriads, now securely scorned,
Would mock the majesty of man's high birth,
Despise his bulwarks, and unpeople earth:
Then with a glance of Fancy to survey,
Far as the faculty can stretch away,
Ten thousand rivers poured at his command,
From urns that never fail, through every land;
These like a deluge with impetuous force,
Those winding modestly a silent course;
The cloud-surmounting Alps, the fruitful vales;
Seas on which every nation spreads her sails;

* "Helmed heads;" Eds. 1782, 1786, Southey. "Helmet heads;" Ed. 1787, and subsequent editions, except Southey's.

The sun, a world whence other worlds drink light,
The crescent moon, the diadem of night,
Stars countless, each in his appointed place,
Fast anchored in the deep abyss of space—
At such a sight to catch the poet's flame,
And with a rapture like his own* exclaim,
"These are thy glorious works, thou Source of good,
How dimly seen, how faintly understood!
Thine, and upheld by thy paternal care,
This universal frame, thus wondrous fair;
Thy power divine, and bounty beyond thought,
Adored and praised in all that thou hast wrought.
Absorbed in that immensity I see,
I shrink abased, and yet aspire to Thee;
Instruct me, guide me to that heavenly day,
Thy words, more clearly than thy works, display,
That, while thy truths my grosser thoughts refine,
I may resemble Thee, and call Thee mine."
O blessed proficiency! surpassing all
That men erroneously their glory call,
The recompense that arts or arms can yield,
The bar, the senate, or the tented field.
Compared with this sublimest life below,
Ye kings and rulers, what have courts to show?
Thus studied, used and consecrated thus,
On earth what is,† seems formed indeed for us;
Not as the plaything of a froward child,
Fretful unless diverted and beguiled,

* *Paradise Lost*, v. 153.

† "Whatever *is*, seems formed indeed for us;" Eds. 1782, 1786, Southey, Bell. "What *is*, seems formed indeed for us;" Eds. 1787, 1788. "On earth what is, seems formed indeed for us;" Eds. 1793, 1794, 1798, and subsequent editions, except Southey's and Bell's.

Much less to feed and fan the fatal fires
Of pride, ambition, or impure desires,
But as a scale, by which the soul ascends
From mighty means to more important ends,
Securely, though by steps but rarely trod,
Mounts from inferior beings up to God,
And sees, by no fallacious light or dim,
Earth made for man, and man himself for him.

Not that I mean to approve, or would enforce,
A superstitious and monastic course:
Truth is not local, God alike pervades
And fills the world of traffic and the shades,
And may be feared amid the busiest scenes,
Or scorned where business never intervenes.
But 'tis not easy with a mind like ours,
Conscious of weakness in its noblest powers,
And in a world where, other ills apart,
The roving eye misleads the careless heart,
To limit thought, by Nature prone to stray
Wherever freakish Fancy points the way;
To bid the pleadings of Self-love be still,
Resign our own and seek our Maker's will;
To spread the page of Scripture, and compare
Our conduct with the laws engraven there;
To measure all that passes in the breast,
Faithfully, fairly, by that sacred test;
To dive into the secret deeps within,
To spare no passion, and no favourite sin,
And search the themes, important above all,
Ourselves, and our recovery from our fall.
But leisure, silence, and a mind released
From anxious thoughts how wealth may be increased,
How to secure, in some propitious hour,

The point of interest or the post of power,
A soul serene, and equally retired
From objects too much dreaded or desired,
Safe from the clamours of perverse dispute,
At least are friendly to the great pursuit.
  Opening the map of God's extensive plan,
We find a little isle, this life of man,
Eternity's unknown expanse appears
Circling around and limiting his years.
The busy race examine and explore
Each creek and cavern of the dangerous shore,
With care collect what in their eyes excels,
Some shining pebbles, and some weeds and shells;
Thus laden, dream that they are rich and great,
And happiest he that groans beneath his weight.
The waves o'ertake them in their serious play,
And every hour sweeps multitudes away;
They shriek and sink, survivors start and weep,
Pursue their sport, and follow to the deep.
A few forsake the throng; with lifted eyes
Ask wealth of Heaven, and gain a real prize,
Truth, wisdom, grace, and peace like that above,
Sealed with his signet whom they serve and love,
Scorned by the rest, with patient hope they wait
A kind release from their imperfect state,
And unregretted are soon snatched away
From scenes of sorrow into glorious day.
  Nor these alone prefer a life recluse,
Who seek retirement for its proper use;
The love of change that lives in every breast,
Genius, and temper, and desire of rest,
Discordant motives in one centre meet,
And each inclines its votary to retreat.

Some minds by nature are averse to noise,
And hate the tumult half the world enjoys,
The lure of avarice, or the pompous prize
That courts display before ambitious eyes,
The fruits that hang on pleasure's flowery stem,
Whate'er enchants them, are no snares to them.
To them the deep recess of dusky groves,
Or forest where the deer securely roves,
The fall of waters, and the song of birds,
And hills that echo to the distant herds,
Are luxuries excelling all the glare
The world can boast, and her chief favourites share.
With eager step, and carelessly arrayed,
For such a cause the Poet seeks the shade,
From all he sees he catches new delight,
Pleased Fancy claps her pinions at the sight;
The rising or the setting orb of day,
The clouds that flit, or slowly float away,
Nature in all the various shapes she wears,
Frowning in storms, or breathing gentle airs,
The snowy robe her wintry state assumes,
Her summer heats, her fruits, and her perfumes,
All, all alike, transport the glowing bard,
Success in rhyme his glory and reward.
O Nature! whose Elysian scenes disclose
His bright perfections at whose word they rose,
Next to that power who formed thee and sustains,
Be thou the great inspirer of my strains.
Still as I touch the lyre, do thou expand
Thy genuine charms, and guide an artless hand,
That I may catch a fire but rarely known,
Give useful light though I should miss renown,
And poring on thy page, whose every line

Bears proof of an intelligence divine,
May feel a heart enriched by what it pays,
That builds its glory on its Maker's praise.
Woe to the man whose wit disclaims its use,
Glittering in vain, or only to seduce,
Who studies Nature with a wanton eye,
Admires the work, but slips the lesson by;
His hours of leisure and recess employs,
In drawing pictures of forbidden joys,
Retires to blazon his own worthless name,
Or shoot the careless with a surer aim.
The Lover too shuns business and alarms,
Tender idolater of absent charms.
Saints offer nothing, in their warmest prayers,
That he devotes not with a zeal like theirs;
'Tis consecration of his heart, soul, time,
And every thought that wanders is a crime.
In sighs he worships his supremely fair,
And weeps a sad libation in despair;
Adores a creature, and devout in vain,
Wins in return an answer of disdain.
As woodbine weds the plant within her reach,
Rough elm, or smooth grained ash, or glossy beech,
In spiral rings ascends the trunk, and lays
Her golden tassels on the leafy sprays,
But does a mischief while she lends a grace,
Straitening its growth by such a strict embrace,
So Love, that clings around the noblest minds,
Forbids the advancement of the soul he binds;
The suitor's air indeed he soon improves,
And forms it to the taste of her he loves,
Teaches his eyes a language, and no less
Refines his speech, and fashions his address;

But farewell promises of happier fruits,
Manly designs, and learning's grave pursuits;
Girt with a chain he cannot wish to break,
His only bliss is sorrow for her sake;
Who will may pant for glory and excel,
Her smile his aim, all higher aims farewell!
Thyrsis, Alexis, or whatever name
May least offend against so pure a flame,
Though sage advice of friends the most sincere
Sounds harshly in so delicate an ear,
And lovers, of all creatures, tame or wild,
Can least brook management, however mild,
Yet let a poet (Poetry disarms
The fiercest animals with magic charms)
Risk an intrusion on thy pensive mood,
And woo and win thee to thy proper good.
Pastoral images and still retreats,
Umbrageous walks and solitary seats,
Sweet birds in concert with harmonious streams,
Soft airs, nocturnal vigils, and day dreams,
Are all enchantments in a case like thine,
Conspire against thy peace with one design,
Soothe thee to make thee but a surer prey,
And feed the fire that wastes thy powers away.
Up!—God has formed thee with a wiser view,
Not to be led in chains, but to subdue,
Calls thee to cope with enemies, and first
Points out a conflict with thyself, the worst.
Woman indeed, a gift he would bestow
When he designed a Paradise below,
The richest earthly boon his hands afford,
Deserves to be beloved, but not adored.
Post away swiftly to more active scenes,

Collect the scattered truths that Study gleans,
Mix with the world, but with its wiser part,
No longer give an image all thine heart;
Its empire is not hers, nor is it thine,
'Tis God's just claim, prerogative divine.
Virtuous and faithful HEBERDEN,* whose skill
Attempts no task it cannot well fulfil,
Gives Melancholy up to Nature's care,
And sends the patient into purer air.
Look where he comes; in this embowered alcove
Stand close concealed, and see a statue move:
Lips busy, and eyes fixed, foot falling slow,
Arms hanging idly down, hands clasped below,
Interpret to the marking eye distress,
Such as its symptoms can alone express.
That tongue is silent now; that silent tongue
Could argue once, could jest, or join the song,
Could give advice, could censure, or commend,
Or charm the sorrows of a drooping friend.
Renounced alike its office and its sport,
Its brisker and its graver strains fall short;
Both fail beneath a fever's secret sway,
And like a summer brook are past away.
This is a sight for Pity to peruse
Till she resemble faintly what she views,
Till Sympathy contract a kindred pain,
Pierced with the woes that she laments in vain.
This of all maladies that man infest,

* In the whole range of medical, it might almost be said of general, biography, there is no one to whom Cowper could have applied more justly the epithets of "virtuous and faithful" than to Dr. William Heberden. When this poem was written, he was, at the age of 71, about to retire from the profession which he had so much adorned.

Claims most compassion, and receives the least:
Job felt it, when he groaned beneath the rod
And the barbed arrows of a frowning God,
And such emollients as his friends could spare,
Friends such as his for modern Jobs prepare.
Blessed, rather cursed, with hearts that never feel,
Kept snug in caskets of close-hammered steel,
With mouths made only to grin wide and eat,
And minds that deem derided pain a treat,
With limbs of British oak, and nerves of wire,
And wit that puppet prompters might inspire,
Their sovereign nostrum is a clumsy joke,
On pangs enforced with God's severest stroke.
But with a soul that ever felt the sting
Of sorrow, sorrow is a sacred thing:
Not to molest, or irritate, or raise
A laugh at his expense, is slender praise;
He that has not usurped the name of man
Does all, and deems too little, all he can,
To assuage the throbbings of the festered part,
And staunch the bleedings of a broken heart.
'Tis not, as heads that never ache suppose,
Forgery of fancy, and a dream of woes;
Man is a harp whose chords elude the sight,
Each yielding harmony, disposed aright,
The screws reversed (a task which if He please
God in a moment executes with ease)
Ten thousand thousand strings at once go loose,
Lost, till He tune them, all their power and use.
Then neither heathy wilds, nor scenes as fair
As ever recompensed the peasant's care,
Nor soft declivities with tufted hills,
Nor view of waters turning busy mills,

Parks in which Art preceptress Nature weds,
Nor gardens interspersed with flowery beds,
Nor gales that catch the scent of blooming groves,
And waft it to the mourner as he roves,
Can call up life into his faded eye,
That passes all he sees unheeded by;
No wounds like those a wounded spirit feels,
No cure for such, till God who makes them heals.
And thou, sad sufferer under nameless ill
That yields not to the touch of human skill,
Improve the kind occasion, understand
A Father's frown, and kiss His chastening hand.
To thee the dayspring, and the blaze of noon,
The purple evening and resplendent moon,
The stars that, sprinkled o'er the vault of night,
Seem drops descending in a shower of light,
Shine not, or undesired and hated shine,
Seen through the medium of a cloud like thine;
Yet seek him, in his favour life his found,
All bliss beside a shadow or a sound;
Then Heaven, eclipsed so long, and this dull earth,
Shall seem to start into a second birth;
Nature assuming a more lovely face,
Borrowing a beauty from the works of grace,
Shall be despised and overlooked no more,
Shall fill thee with delights unfelt before,
Impart to things inanimate a voice,
And bid her mountains and her hills rejoice;
The sound shall run along the winding vales,
And thou enjoy an Eden ere it fails.

"Ye groves," (the statesman at his desk exclaims,
Sick of a thousand disappointed aims)
"My patrimonial treasure and my pride,

Beneath your shades your grey possessor hide,
Receive me, languishing for that repose
The servant of the public never knows.
Ye saw me once (ah, those regretted days,
When boyish innocence was all my praise!)
Hour after hour delightfully allot
To studies then familiar, since forgot,
And cultivate a taste for ancient song,
Catching its ardour as I mused along;
Nor seldom, as propitious Heaven might send,
What once I valued and could boast, a friend,
Were witnesses how cordially I pressed
His undissembling virtue to my breast;
Receive me now, not uncorrupt as then,
Nor guiltless of corrupting other men,
But versed in arts that while they seem to stay
A falling empire, hasten its decay.
To the fair haven of my native home,
The wreck of what I was, fatigued I come;
For once I can approve the patriot's voice,
And make the course he recommends my choice;
We meet at last in one sincere desire,
His wish and mine both prompt me to retire."
'Tis done;—he steps into the welcome chaise,
Lolls at his ease behind four handsome bays,
That whirl away from business and debate
The disencumbered Atlas of the state.

Ask not the boy, who when the breeze of morn
First shakes the glittering drops from every thorn,
Unfolds his flock, then under bank or bush
Sits linking cherry-stones, or platting rush,
How fair is Freedom?—he was always free:
To carve his rustic name upon a tree,

To snare the mole, or with ill fashioned hook
To draw the incautious minnow from the brook,
Are life's prime pleasures in his simple view,
His flock the chief concern he ever knew;
She shines but little in his heedless eyes,
The good we never miss we rarely prize:
But ask the noble drudge in state affairs,
Escaped from office and its constant cares,
What charms he sees in Freedom's smile expressed,
In Freedom lost so long, now repossessed;
The tongue whose strains were cogent as commands,
Revered at home, and felt in foreign lands,
Shall own itself a stammerer in that cause,
Or plead its silence as its best applause.
He knows indeed that, whether dressed or rude,
Wild without art, or artfully subdued,
Nature in every form inspires delight,
But never marked her with so just a sight.
Her hedge-row shrubs, a variegated store,
With woodbine and wild roses mantled o'er,
Green balks and furrowed lands, the stream that spreads
Its cooling vapour o'er the dewy meads,
Downs that almost escape the inquiring eye,
That melt and fade into the distant sky,
Beauties he lately slighted as he passed,
Seem all created since he travelled last.
Master of all the enjoyments he designed,
No rough annoyance rankling in his mind,
What early philosophic hours he keeps,
How regular his meals, how sound he sleeps!
Not sounder he that on the mainmast head,
While morning kindles with a windy red,

Begins a long look out for distant land,
Nor quits till evening watch his giddy stand,
Then swift descending with a seaman's haste,
Slips to his hammock, and forgets the blast.
He chooses company, but not the squire's,
Whose wit is rudeness, whose good breeding tires;
Nor yet the parson's, who would gladly come,
Obsequious when abroad, though proud at home;
Nor can he much affect the neighbouring peer,
Whose toe of emulation treads too near;
But wisely seeks a more convenient friend,
With whom, dismissing forms, he may unbend;
A man whom marks of condescending grace
Teach, while they flatter him, his proper place;
Who comes when called, and at a word withdraws,
Speaks with reserve, and listens with applause;
Some plain mechanic, who, without pretence
To birth or wit, nor gives nor takes offence;
On whom he rests well pleased his weary powers,
And talks and laughs away his vacant hours.
The tide of life, swift always in its course,
May run in cities with a brisker force,
But nowhere with a current so serene,
Or half so clear, as in the rural scene.
Yet how fallacious is all earthly bliss,
What obvious truths the wisest heads may miss!
Some pleasures live a month, and some a year,
But short the date of all we gather here;
No* happiness is felt, except the true,
That does not charm the more for being now.

* "Nor;" Eds. 1782, 1786, 1787, 1788, Southey. "No;" Eds. 1793, 1794, 1798, and subsequent editions, except Southey's.

This observation, as it chanced, not made,
Or if the thought occurred, not duly weighed,
He sighs,—for after all, by slow degrees,
The spot he loved has lost the power to please;
To cross his ambling pony day by day,
Seems at the best but dreaming life away;
The prospect, such as might enchant despair,
He views it not, or sees no beauty there;
With aching heart, and discontented looks,
Returns at noon to billiards, or to books,
But feels, while grasping at his faded joys,
A secret thirst of his renounced employs.
He chides the tardiness of every post,
Pants to be told of battles won or lost,
Blames his own indolence, observes, though late,
'Tis criminal to leave a sinking state,
Flies to the levee, and, received with grace,
Kneels, kisses hands, and shines again in place.
  Suburban villas, highway-side retreats,
That dread the encroachment of our growing streets,
Tight boxes neatly sashed, and in a blaze
With all a July sun's collected rays,
Delight the citizen, who gasping there,
Breathes clouds of dust, and calls it country air.
O sweet retirement! who would balk the thought,
That could afford retirement, or could not?
'Tis such an easy walk, so smooth and straight,
The second milestone fronts the garden gate;
A step if fair, and if a shower approach,
You find safe shelter in the next stage-coach.
There prisoned in a parlour snug and small,
Like bottled wasps upon a southern wall,

The man of business and his friends compressed
Forget their labours, and yet find no rest;
But still 'tis rural—trees are to be seen
From every window, and the fields are green;
Ducks paddle in the pond before the door,
And what could a remoter scene show more?
A sense of elegance we rarely find
The portion of a mean or vulgar mind,
And ignorance of better things makes man,
Who cannot much, rejoice in what he can;
And he that deems his leisure well bestowed
In contemplation of a turnpike-road,
Is occupied as well, employs his hours
As wisely, and as much improves his powers,
As he that slumbers in pavilions graced
With all the charms of an accomplished taste.
Yet hence, alas! insolvencies, and hence
The unpitied victim of ill judged expense,
From all his wearisome engagements freed,
Shakes hands with business, and retires indeed.

Your prudent grandmammas, ye modern belles,
Content with Bristol, Bath, and Tunbridge Wells,
When health required it, would consent to roam,
Else more attached to pleasures found at home.
But now alike, gay widow, virgin, wife,
Ingenious to diversify dull life,
In coaches, chaises, caravans, and hoys,
Fly to the coast for daily, nightly joys,
And all, impatient of dry land, agree
With one consent to rush into the sea.

Ocean exhibits, fathomless and broad,
Much of the power and majesty of God;
He swathes about the swelling of the deep,

That shines and rests, as infants smile and sleep;
Vast as it is, it answers, as it flows,
The breathings of the lightest air that blows;
Curling and whitening over all the waste,
The rising waves obey the increasing blast,
Abrupt and horrid as the tempest roars,
Thunder and flash upon the steadfast shores,
Till He that rides the whirlwind, checks the rein,
Then all the world of waters sleeps again.
Nereids or Dryads, as the fashion leads,
Now in the floods, now panting in the meads,
Votaries of Pleasure still, where'er she dwells,
Near barren rocks, in palaces, or cells,
Oh! grant a poet leave to recommend
(A poet fond of Nature and your friend)
Her slighted works to your admiring view;
Her works must needs excel who fashioned you.
Would ye, when rambling in your morning ride,
With some unmeaning coxcomb at your side,
Condemn the prattler, for his idle pains,
To waste unheard the music of his strains,
And deaf to all the impertinence of tongue,
That, while it courts, affronts and does you wrong,
Mark well the finished plan without a fault,
The seas globose and huge, the o'erarching vault,
Earth's millions daily fed, a world employed
In gathering plenty yet to be enjoyed,
Till Gratitude grew vocal in the praise
Of God, beneficent in all His ways;
Graced with such wisdom, how would beauty shine!
Ye want but that to seem indeed divine.
Anticipated rents, and bills unpaid,
Force many a shining youth into the shade,

Not to redeem his time, but his estate,
And play the fool, but at a cheaper rate.
There hid in loathed obscurity, removed
From pleasures left, but never more beloved,
He just endures, and, with a sickly spleen,
Sighs o'er the beauties of the charming scene.
Nature indeed looks prettily in rhyme,
Streams tinkle sweetly in poetic chime,
The warblings of the blackbird, clear and strong,
Are musical enough in Thomson's song;
And Cobham's groves, and Windsor's green retreats,
When Pope describes them, have a thousand sweets;
He likes the country, but in truth must own,
Most likes it, when he studies it in town.
Poor Jack—no matter who—for when I blame,
I pity, and must therefore sink the name,
Lived in his saddle, loved the chase, the course,
And always, ere he mounted, kissed his horse.
The estate his sires had owned in ancient years,
Was quickly distanced, matched against a peer's.
Jack vanished, was regretted and forgot,
'Tis wild good nature's never failing lot.
At length, when all had long supposed him dead,
By cold submersion, razor, rope, or lead,
My Lord, alighting at his usual place,
The Crown, took notice of an ostler's face.
Jack knew his friend, but hoped in that disguise
He might escape the most observing eyes,
And whistling, as if unconcerned and gay,
Curried his nag, and looked another way.
Convinced at last, upon a nearer view,
'Twas he, the same, the very Jack he knew,
O'erwhelmed at once with wonder, grief, and joy,

He pressed him much to quit his base employ;
His countenance, his purse, his heart, his hand,
Influence, and power, were all at his command:
Peers are not always generous as well bred,
But Granby was,* meant truly what he said.
Jack bowed, and was obliged;—confessed 'twas strange,
That so retired he should not wish a change,
But knew no medium between guzzling beer,
And his old stint—three thousand pounds a year.
Thus some retire to nourish hopeless woe,
Some seeking happiness not found below,
Some to comply with humour, and a mind
To social scenes by nature disinclined,
Some swayed by fashion, some by deep disgust,
Some self-impoverished and because they must,
But few that court Retirement are aware
Of half the toils they must encounter there.
Lucrative offices are seldom lost
For want of powers proportioned to the post:
Give e'en a dunce the employment he desires,
And he soon finds the talents it requires;
A business with an income at its heels
Furnishes always oil for its own wheels.
But in his arduous enterprise to close
His active years with indolent repose,
He finds the labours of that state exceed
His utmost faculties, severe indeed.
'Tis easy to resign a toilsome place,

* If "Granby" be intended for a real title, the story probably refers to the soldier Marquis of Granby, 1721-1770, the same whose bald head still shines upon some few village sign-boards. In strictness he was not a peer.

But not to manage leisure with a grace;
Absence of occupation is not rest,
A mind quite vacant is a mind distressed.
The veteran steed excused his task at length,
In kind compassion of his failing strength,
And turned into the park or mead to graze,
Exempt from future service all his days,
There feels a pleasure perfect in its kind,
Ranges at liberty, and snuffs the wind:
But when his lord would quit the busy road,
To taste a joy like that he has bestowed,
He proves, less happy than his favoured brute,
A life of ease a difficult pursuit.
Thought, to the man that never thinks, may seem
As natural as when asleep to dream;
But reveries (for human minds will act)
Specious in show, impossible in fact,
Those flimsy webs that break as soon as wrought,
Attain not to the dignity of thought;
Nor yet the swarms that occupy the brain,
Where dreams of dress, intrigue, and pleasure reign;
Nor such as useless conversation breeds,
Or lust engenders, and indulgence feeds.
Whence, and what are we? to what end ordained?
What means the drama by the world sustained?
Business or vain amusement, care or mirth,
Divide the frail inhabitants of earth.
Is duty a mere sport, or an employ?
Life an intrusted talent, or a toy?
Is there, as Reason, Conscience, Scripture say,
Cause to provide for a great future day,
When, earth's assigned duration at an end,
Man shall be summoned and the dead attend?

The trumpet—will it sound? the curtain rise?
And show the august tribunal of the skies,
Where no prevarication shall avail,
Where eloquence and artifice shall fail,
The pride of arrogant distinctions fall,
And Conscience and our Conduct judge us all?
Pardon me, ye that give the midnight oil
To learned cares or philosophic toil,
Though I revere your honourable names,
Your useful labours, and important aims,
And hold the world indebted to your aid,
Enriched with the discoveries ye have made,
Yet let me stand excused, if I esteem
A mind employed on so sublime a theme,
Pushing her bold inquiry to the date
And outline of the present transient state,
And after poising her adventurous wings,
Settling at last upon eternal things,
Far more intelligent, and better taught
The strenuous use of profitable thought,
Than ye, when happiest, and enlightened most,
And highest in renown, can justly boast.
A mind unnerved, or indisposed to bear
The weight of subjects worthiest of her care,
Whatever hopes a change of scene inspires,
Must change her nature, or in vain retires.
An idler is a watch that wants both hands,
As useless if it goes as when it stands.
Books, therefore, not the scandal of the shelves
In which lewd sensualists print out themselves;
Nor those in which the stage gives vice a blow,
With what success let modern manners show;

Nor his* who, for the bane of thousands born,
Built God a church, and laughed his word to scorn,
Skilful alike to seem devout and just,
And stab Religion with a sly side-thrust;
Nor those of learned philologists, who chase
A panting syllable through time and space,
Start it at home, and hunt it in the dark,
To Gaul, to Greece, and into Noah's ark;
But such as Learning without false pretence,
The friend of Truth, the associate of sound Sense,
And such as, in the zeal of good design,
Strong Judgment labouring in the scripture mine,
All such as manly and great souls produce,
Worthy to live, and of eternal use:
Behold in these what leisure hours demand,
Amusement and true knowledge hand in hand.
  Luxury gives the mind a childish cast,
And while she polishes, perverts the taste;
Habits of close attention, thinking heads,
Become more rare as dissipation spreads,
Till authors hear at length one general cry,
Tickle and entertain us, or we die.
The loud demand, from year to year the same,
Beggars Invention, and makes Fancy lame,
Till farce itself, most mournfully jejune,
Calls for the kind assistance of a tune;
And novels (witness every month's Review)*
Belie their name, and offer nothing new.
The mind, relaxing into needful sport,

* Voltaire:—"DEO EREXIT VOLTAIRE," is inscribed upon the altar of the chapel at Ferney.

† The Monthly Review, much thought of by Cowper, and by the whole world of letters in his time.

Should turn to writers of an abler sort,
Whose wit well managed, and whose classic style,
Give Truth a lustre, and make Wisdom smile.
Friends (for I cannot stint as some have done,
Too rigid, in my view, that name to one,
Though one, I grant it, in the generous breast
Will stand advanced a step above the rest;
Flowers by that name promiscuously we call,
But one, the rose, the regent of them all)—
Friends, not adopted with a schoolboy's haste,
But chosen with a nice discerning taste,
Well born, well disciplined, who, placed apart
From vulgar minds, have honour much at heart,
And, though the world may think the ingredients odd,
The love of virtue, and the fear of God!
Such friends prevent what else would soon succeed,
A temper rustic as the life we lead,
And keep the polish of the manners clean,
As theirs who bustle in the busiest scene;
For solitude, however some may rave,
Seeming a sanctuary, proves a grave,
A sepulchre in which the living lie,
Where all good qualities grow sick and die.
I praise the Frenchman,* his remark was shrewd,
"How sweet, how passing sweet is solitude!
But grant me still a friend in my retreat,
Whom I may whisper—solitude is sweet."
Yet neither these delights, nor aught beside,
That appetite can ask, or wealth provide,
Can save us always from a tedious day,
Or shine the dulness of still life away;
Divine Communion, carefully enjoyed,

* Bruyere.

Or sought with energy, must fill the void.
O sacred art! to which alone life owes
Its happiest seasons, and a peaceful close.
Scorned in a world, indebted to that scorn
For evils daily felt and hardly borne,
Not knowing thee, we reap, with bleeding hands,
Flowers of rank odour upon thorny lands,
And while Experience cautions us in vain,
Grasp seeming Happiness, and find it Pain.
Despondence, self-deserted in her grief,
Lost by abandoning her own relief,
Murmuring and ungrateful Discontent,
That scorns afflictions mercifully meant,
Those humours, tart as wines upon the fret,
Which Idleness and Weariness beget,
These and a thousand plagues that haunt the breast,
Fond of the phantom of an earthly rest,
Divine Communion chases, as the day
Drives to their dens the obedient beasts of prey.
See Judah's promised king, bereft of all,
Driven out an exile from the face of Saul,
To distant caves* the lonely wanderer flies,
To seek that peace a tyrant's frown denies.
Hear the sweet accents of his tuneful voice,
Hear him, o'erwhelmed with sorrow, yet rejoice;
No womanish or wailing grief has part,
No, not a moment, in his royal heart;
'Tis manly music, such as martyrs make,
Suffering with gladness for a Saviour's sake;
His soul exults, Hope animates his lays,
The sense of mercy kindles into praise,
And wilds familiar with a lion's roar,

* 1 Samuel, xxii. 1; xxiv. 3.

Ring with ecstatic sounds unheard before;*
'Tis Love like his that can alone defeat
The foes of man, or make a desert sweet.
  Religion does not censure or exclude
Unnumbered pleasures harmlessly pursued;
To study culture, and with artful toil
To meliorate and tame the stubborn soil;
To give dissimilar yet fruitful lands
The grain, or herb, or plant that each demands;
To cherish Virtue in an humble state,
And share the joys your Bounty may create;
To mark the matchless workings of the Power
That shuts within its seed the future flower,
Bids these in elegance of form excel,
In colour these, and those delight the smell,
Sends Nature forth, the daughter of the skies,
To dance on earth, and charm all human eyes;
To teach the canvass innocent deceit,
Or lay the landscape on the snowy sheet—
These, these are arts pursued without a crime,
That leave no stain upon the wing of Time.
  Me poetry (or rather notes that aim,
Feebly and vainly, at poetic fame)
Employs, shut out from more important views,
Fast by the banks of the slow-winding Ouse;
Content if thus sequestered I may raise
A monitor's, though not a poet's, praise,
And while I teach an art too little known,
To close life wisely, may not waste my own.

Psalm xviii.

THE YEARLY DISTRESS, OR TITHING TIME, AT STOCK, IN ESSEX.*

Verses addressed to a Country Clergyman complaining of the disagreeableness of the day annually appointed for receiving the Dues at the Parsonage.

COME, ponder well, for 'tis no jest,
To laugh it would be wrong,
The troubles of a worthy priest,
The burden of my song.

This priest he merry is and blithe
Three quarters of a year,
But oh! it cuts him like a scythe,
When tithing time draws near.

He then is full of fright and fears,
As one at point to die,
And long before the day appears,
He heaves up many a sigh.

For then the farmers come jog, jog,
Along the miry road,
Each heart as heavy as a log,
To make their payments good.

Printed in the edition of the Poems, Lond. 2 vols. 8vo. 1803, i. 257. The Country Clergyman alluded to was, of course, the Rev. W. C. Unwin, Rector of Stock, in Essex, and son of Mrs. Unwin.

In sooth the sorrow of such days
Is not to be expressed,
When he that takes, and he that pays,
Are both alike distressed.

Now, all unwelcome at his gates,
The clumsy swains alight,
With rueful faces and bald pates—
He trembles at the sight.

And well he may, for well he knows
Each bumpkin of the clan,
Instead of paying what he owes,
Will cheat him if he can.

So in they come—each makes his leg,
And flings his head before,
And looks as if he came to beg,
And not to quit a score.

"And how does miss and madam do,
The little boy and all?"
"All tight and well. And how do you,
Good Mr. What-d'ye-call?"

The dinner comes, and down they sit:
Were e'er such hungry folk?
There's little talking, and no wit;
It is no time to joke.

One wipes his nose upon his sleeve,
One spits upon the floor,
Yet, not to give offence or grieve,
Holds up the cloth before.

The punch goes round, and they are dull,
And lumpish still as ever;
Like barrels with their bellies full,
They only weigh the heavier.

At length the busy time begins,
"Come, neighbours, we must wag"—
The money chinks, down drop their chins,
Each lugging out his bag.

One talks of mildew and of frost,
And one of storms of hail,
And one of pigs that he has lost
By maggots at the tail.

Quoth one, "A rarer man than you
In pulpit none shall hear:
But yet, methinks, to tell you true,
You sell it plaguy dear."

Oh! why are farmers made so coarse,
Or clergy made so fine?
A kick that scarce would move a horse,
May kill a sound divine.

Then let the boobies stay at home;
'Twould cost him, I dare say,
Less trouble taking twice the sum
Without the clowns that pay.

SONNET ADDRESSED TO HENRY COWPER, ESQ.

On his emphatical and interesting delivery of the defence of Warren Hastings, Esq. in the House of Lords.

COWPER, whose silver voice, tasked sometimes hard,
Legends prolix delivers in the ears
(Attentive when thou readest) of England's peers,
Let verse at length yield thee thy just reward.
Thou wast not heard with drowsy disregard,
Expending late on all that length of plea
Thy generous powers, but silence honoured thee,
Mute as e'er gazed on orator or bard.
Thou art not voice alone, but hast beside
Both heart and head; and couldst with music sweet
Of Attic phrase and senatorial tone,
Like thy renowned forefathers, far and wide
Thy fame diffuse, praised not for utterance meet
Of others' speech, but magic of thy own.

* The incident which gave occasion to these verses occurred in February, 1788, and the Sonnet was published in the Gentleman's Magazine for the following April, p. 350. It was first included in the collected Edition of Cowper's Works, 2 vols. 8vo. Lond. 1803, i. 261. The gentleman to whom the sonnet was addressed was a first cousin of the poet. (Collins's Peerage, ed. Brydges, iv. 165, and see Cowper's letter to Lady Hesketh of 22 Feb. 1788.)

LINES ADDRESSED TO DR. DARWIN,

AUTHOR OF THE " BOTANIC GARDEN."

TWO Poets,* (poets, by report,
Not oft so well agree)
Sweet harmonist of Flora's court!
Conspire to honour thee.

They best can judge a poet's worth,
Who oft themselves have known
The pangs of a poetic birth,
By labours of their own.

We therefore pleased extol thy song,
Though various yet complete,
Rich in embellishment as strong,
And learnèd as 'tis sweet.†

No envy mingles with our praise,
Though, could our hearts repine
At any poet's happier lays,
They would, they must, at thine.

* Alluding to a poem by Hayley, which was inserted with these lines in subsequent editions of the Botanic Garden. Cowper wrote the lines on the suggestion of Hayley, and sent them to him in a letter dated June 10, 1792. They were first printed among Cowper's Poems, in the edition, 2 vols. 8vo. Lond. 1803, i. 262.

† Up to the edition of 1808 this line was printed, " And learned (pronounced ' learn'd ') as it is sweet."

But we, in mutual bondage knit
Of friendship's closest tie,
Can gaze on even Darwin's wit
With an unjaundiced eye;

And deem the Bard, whoe'er he be,
And howsoever known,
Who would not twine a wreath for Thee,
Unworthy of his own.

ON MRS. MONTAGU'S FEATHER-HANGINGS.

THE Birds put off their every hue,
To dress a room for Montagu;
The Peacock sends his heavenly dyes,
His rainbows and his starry eyes;
The Pheasant plumes which round infold
His mantling neck with downy gold;
The Cock his arched tail's azure show;
And, river-blanched, the Swan his snow;
All tribes beside of Indian name,

* Cowpers's Letters in May and June 1788 contain many allusions to Mrs. Montagu, to her Essay on Shakespeare, and to the gay assemblies of combined literature and fashion which she gathered around her, in her mansion in Portman Square. The feather-hangings adorned one of the rooms in which she held "her court." These lines were written in the former of those months. They appeared in the Gentleman's Magazine for June 1788, p. 542, and in the collected Edition of Cowper's Poems, 2 vols. 8vo. Lond. 1803, i. 263.

That glossy shine, or vivid flame;
Where rises and where sets the day,
Whate'er they boast of rich and gay,
Contribute to the gorgeous plan,
Proud to advance it all they can.
This plumage, neither dashing shower,
Nor blasts that shake the dripping bower,
Shall drench again or discompose,
But screened from every storm that blows,
It boasts a splendour ever new,
Safe with protecting Montagu.
To the same Patroness resort,
Secure of favour at her court,
Strong Genius, from whose forge of thought
Forms rise, to quick perfection wrought,
Which, though new-born, with vigour move,
Like Pallas springing armed from Jove—
Imagination scattering round
Wild roses over furrowed ground,
Which Labour of his frown beguile,
And teach Philosophy a smile—
Wit flashing on Religion's side,
Whose fires, to sacred Truth applied,
The gem, though luminous before,
Obtrude on human notice more,
Like sunbeams on the golden height
Of some tall temple playing bright—
Well tutored Learning, from his books
Dismissed with grave, not haughty, looks,
Their order on his shelves exact,
Nor more harmonious or compact,
Than that to which he keeps confined
The various treasures of his mind—

All these to Montagu's repair,
Ambitious of a shelter there.
There Genius, Learning, Fancy, Wit,
Their ruffled plumage calm refit,
(For stormy troubles loudest roar
Around their flight who highest soar)
And in her eye, and by her aid,
Shine safe without a fear to fade.
She thus maintains divided sway
With yon bright regent of the day;
The Plume and Poet both we know
Their lustre to his influence owe;
And she the works of Phœbus aiding,
Both Poet saves and Plume from fading.

VERSES

Supposed to be written by Alexander Selkirk, during his solitary abode in the island of Juan Fernandez.*

I AM monarch of all I survey,
My right there is none to dispute,
From the centre all round to the sea,
I am lord of the fowl and the brute.
O Solitude! where are the charms
That sages have seen in thy face?
Better dwell in the midst of alarms,
Than reign in this horrible place.

* Poems, 1782, 8vo. p. 305. Cowper probably derived his knowledge of the history of Alexander Selkirk from Steele's account of him published in the Englishman, in 1713.

I am out of Humanity's reach,
I must finish my journey alone,
Never hear the sweet music of speech,
I start at the sound of my own.
The beasts that roam over the plain,
My form with indifference see,
They are so unacquainted with man,
Their tameness is shocking to me.

Society, Friendship, and Love,
Divinely bestowed upon man,
Oh! had I the wings of a dove,
How soon would I taste you again!
My sorrows I then might assuage
In the ways of religion and truth,
Might learn from the wisdom of age,
And be cheered by the sallies of youth.

Religion! what treasure untold
Resides in that heavenly word!
More precious than silver and gold,
Or all that this earth can afford,
But the sound of the church-going bell
These valleys and rocks never heard,
Never sighed at the sound of a knell,
Or smiled when a sabbath appeared.

Ye Winds that have made me your sport,
Convey to this desolate shore,
Some cordial endearing report
Of a land I shall visit no more.

My friends, do they now and then send
A wish or a thought after me?
Oh! tell me I yet have a friend,
Though a friend I am never to see.

How fleet is a glance of the Mind,
Compared with the speed of its flight,
The Tempest itself lags behind,
And the swift-winged arrows of Light.
When I think of my own native land,
In a moment I seem to be there;
But alas! Recollection at hand
Soon hurries me back to despair.

But the sea-fowl is gone to her nest,
The beast is laid down in his lair,
Even here is a season of rest,
And I to my cabin repair.
There is Mercy in every place,
And Mercy, encouraging thought!
Gives even Affliction a grace,
And reconciles man to his lot.

ON OBSERVING SOME NAMES OF LITTLE NOTE RECORDED IN THE BIOGRAPHIA BRITANNICA.

H, fond attempt to give a deathless lot
To names ignoble, born to be forgot!
In vain recorded in historic page,
They court the notice of a future age:
Those twinkling, tiny lustres of the land
Drop one by one from Fame's neglecting hand;
Lethæan gulfs receive them as they fall,
And dark oblivion soon absorbs them all.

So when a child, as playful children use,
Has burnt to tinder a stale last year's news,
The flame extinct, he views the roving fire—
There goes my lady, and there goes the squire,
There goes the parson—O illustrious spark!
And there, scarce less illustrious, goes the clerk.

* Poems, 1782, 8vo. p. 314. Written in 1780, and sent to the Rev. W. Unwin in a letter dated Sept. 3, in that year.

REPORT OF AN ADJUDGED CASE,

NOT TO BE FOUND IN ANY OF THE BOOKS.

BETWEEN Nose and Eyes a strange contest arose,
The spectacles set them unhappily wrong;
The point in dispute was, as all the world knows,
To which the said spectacles ought to belong.

So Tongue was the lawyer, and argued the cause
With a great deal of skill, and a wig full of learning;
While Chief Baron Ear sat to balance the laws,
So famed for his talent in nicely discerning.

"In behalf of the Nose it will quickly appear,
And your lordship," he said, "will undoubtedly find,
That the Nose has had spectacles always in wear,
Which amounts to possession time out of mind."

Then holding the spectacles up to the court—
"Your lordship observes they are made with a straddle,
As wide as the bridge of the Nose is; in short,
Designed to sit close to it, just like a saddle.

* Poems, 1782, 8vo. p. 315. Sent in a letter to Joseph Hill, on Christmas Day, 1780, and to the Rev. W. Unwin, in a letter written in the same month.

" Again, would your lordship a moment suppose
('Tis a case that has happened, and may be again)
That the visage or countenance had not a Nose,
Pray who would, or who could, wear spectacles
then?

" On the whole it appears, and my argument shows,
With a reasoning the court will never condemn,
That the spectacles plainly were made for the Nose,
And the Nose was as plainly intended for them."

Then shifting his side, as a lawyer knows how,
He pleaded again in behalf of the Eyes;
But what were his arguments few people know,
For the court did not think they were equally
wise.

So his lordship decreed, with a grave solemn tone,
Decisive and clear, without one if or but—
That, whenever the Nose put his spectacles on,
By daylight or candlelight—Eyes should be shut.

ON THE

PROMOTION OF EDWARD THURLOW, ESQ.

TO THE LORD HIGH CHANCELLORSHIP

OF ENGLAND.*

ROUND Thurlow's head in early youth,
And in his sportive days,
Fair Science poured the light of truth,
And Genius shed his rays.

" See!" with united wonder, cried
The experienced and the sage,
" Ambition in a boy supplied
With all the skill of age.

" Discernment, Eloquence, and Grace,
Proclaim him born to sway
The balance in the highest place,
And bear the palm away."

The praise bestowed was just and wise,
He sprang impetuous forth,
Secure of conquest where the prize
Attends superior worth.

* Poems, 1782, 8vo. p. 309. Written for Joseph Hill, and sent to him in a letter dated Nov. 14, 1779

So the best courser on the plain
Ere yet he starts is known,
And does but at the goal obtain
What all had deemed his own.

ODE TO PEACE.*

COME, peace of mind, delightful guest!
Return and make thy downy nest
Once more in this sad heart:
Nor riches I, nor power pursue,
Nor hold forbidden joys in view,
We therefore need not part.

Where wilt thou dwell, if not with me,
From Avarice and Ambition free,
And Pleasure's fatal wiles?
For whom, alas! dost thou prepare
The sweets that I was wont to share,
The banquet of thy smiles?

The great, the gay, shall they partake
The Heaven that thou alone canst make?
And wilt thou quit the stream
That murmurs through the dewy mead,
The grove, and the sequestered shed,
To be a guest with them?

* Poems, 1782, 8vo. p. 310.

For thee I panted, thee I prized,
For thee I gladly sacrificed
  Whate'er I loved before,
And shall I see thee start away,
And helpless, hopeless, hear thee say—
  Farewell! we meet no more?

HUMAN FRAILTY.*

WEAK and irresolute is man;
  The purpose of to-day,
Woven with pains into his plan,
  To-morrow rends away.

The bow well bent, and smart the spring,
  Vice seems already slain;
But Passion rudely snaps the string,
  And it revives again.

Some foe to his upright intent
  Finds out his weaker part;
Virtue engages his assent,
  But Pleasure wins his heart.

'Tis here the folly of the wise
  Through all his art we view;
And while his tongue the charge denies,
  His conscience owns it true.

* Poems, 1782, 8vo. p. 311.

Bound on a voyage of awful length
And dangers little known,
A stranger to superior strength,
Man vainly trusts his own.

But oars alone can ne'er prevail
To reach the distant coast;
The breath of Heaven must swell the sail,
Or all the toil is lost.

THE MODERN PATRIOT.*

REBELLION is my theme all day;
I only wish 'twould come
(As who knows but perhaps it may?)
A little nearer home.

* Poems, 1782, 8vo. p. 313. Cowper's observations on these lines, in one of his letters, are illustrative of the simplicity and candour of his character, at the same time that they convey a valuable truth. "When I wrote last," he remarked, in a letter to the Rev. W. Unwin, "I was a little inclined to send you a copy of verses, entitled the Modern Patriot, but was not quite pleased with a line or two which I found it difficult to mend, therefore did not. At night I read Mr. Burke's speech in the newspaper, and was so well pleased with his proposals for a reformation, and the temper in which he made them, that I began to think better of his cause, and burnt my verses. Such is the lot of the man who writes upon the subject of the day; the aspect of affairs changes in an hour or two, and his opinion with it; what was just and well deserved satire in the morning, in the evening becomes a libel; the author commences his own judge, and while he condemns with unrelenting severity what he so lately approved, is sorry to find that he has laid his leaf-gold upon touchwood, which crumbled away under his fingers." Letter to Rev. W. Unwin, Feb. 27, 1780.

Yon roaring boys, who rave and fight
  On the other side the Atlantic,
I always held them in the right,
  But most so when most frantic.

When lawless mobs insult the Court,
  That man shall be my toast,
If breaking windows be the sport,
  Who bravely breaks the most.

But oh! for him my Fancy culls
  The choicest flowers she bears,
Who constitutionally pulls
  Your house about your ears.

Such civil broils are my delight,
  Though some folks can't endure them,
Who say the mob are mad outright,
  And that a rope must cure them.

A rope! I wish we patriots had
  Such strings for all who need 'em—
What! hang a man for going mad!
  Then farewell British freedom.

ON THE

BURNING OF LORD MANSFIELD'S LIBRARY,

TOGETHER WITH HIS MSS. BY THE MOB, IN

THE MONTH OF JUNE, 1780.*

SO then—the Vandals of our isle,
Sworn foes to sense and law,
Have burnt to dust a nobler pile
Than ever Roman saw!

And Murray sighs o'er Pope, and Swift,
And many a treasure more,
The well judged purchase, and the gift
That graced his lettered store.

Their pages mangled, burnt, and torn,
The loss was his alone;
But ages yet to come shall mourn
The burning of his own.

* Poems, 1782, 8vo p. 318. Written June 22, 1780, "before I rose this morning," as Cowper states in a letter of that date to Newton.

ON THE SAME.

HEN Wit and Genius meet their doom
In all-devouring flame,
They tell us of the fate of Rome,
And bid us fear the same.

O'er Murray's loss the Muses wept,
They felt the rude alarm,
Yet blessed the guardian care that kept
His sacred head from harm.

There Memory, like the bee that's fed
From Flora's balmy store,
The quintessence of all he read
Had treasured up before.

The lawless herd, with fury blind,
Have done him cruel wrong;
The flowers are gone—but still we find
The honey on his tongue.

Poems, 1782, 8vo. p. 319.

THE LOVE OF THE WORLD REPROVED

OR, HYPOCRISY DETECTED.*

THUS says the prophet of the Turk,
"Good Mussulman, abstain from pork;
There is a part in every swine
No friend or follower of mine
May taste, whate'er his inclination,
On pain of excommunication."
Such Mahomet's mysterious charge,
And thus he left the point at large.
[Had he the sinful part expressed,
They might with safety eat the rest;
But for one piece they thought it hard
From the whole hog to be debarred;
And set their wit at work to find
What joint the prophet had in mind.]
Much controversy straight arose,
These choose the back, the belly those;
By some 'tis confidently said
He meant not to forbid the head;
While others at that doctrine rail,
And piously prefer the tail.

* It may be proper to inform the reader that this piece has already appeared in print, having found its way, though with some unnecessary additions by an unknown hand, into the Leeds Journal, without the author's privity.—(C. 1782.)

Poems, 1782, 8vo. p. 320. The story was communicated to Cowper by Newton, and the unnecessary prosaic lines, 9 to 14, were added by the latter. See Southey's Cowper, viii. 323. Cowper wrote his portion in about an hour.

Thus, Conscience freed from every clog,
Mahometans eat up the hog.
You laugh—'tis well—the tale applied
May make you laugh on t'other side.
"Renounce the world"—the preacher cries.
"We do"—a multitude replies.
While one as innocent regards
A snug and friendly game at cards;
And one, whatever you may say,
Can see no evil in a play;
Some love a concert, or a race;
And others shooting, and the chase.
Reviled and loved, renounced and followed,
Thus, bit by bit, the world is swallowed;
Each thinks his neighbour makes too free,
Yet likes a slice as well as he:
With sophistry their sauce they sweeten,
Till quite from tail to snout 'tis eaten.

ON

THE DEATH OF MRS. THROCKMORTON'S BULLFINCH.*

YE nymphs! if e'er your eyes were red
With tears o'er hapless favourites shed,
Oh! share Maria's grief;
Her favourite, even in his cage,
(What will not hunger's cruel rage?)
Assassined by a thief!

* Poems, 1794-5, ii. 343. Written about September 1788. See Letter of Cowper to Rose, Sept. 25, 1788.

Where Rhenus strays his vines among,
The egg was laid from which he sprung;
And though by nature mute,
Or only with a whistle blessed,
Well taught, he all the sounds expressed
Of flageolet or flute.

The honours of his ebon poll
Were brighter than the sleekest mole,
His bosom of the hue
With which Aurora decks the skies,
When piping winds shall soon arise,
To sweep away* the dew.

Above, below, in all the house,
Dire foe alike of bird and mouse,
No cat had leave to dwell;
And Bully's cage supported stood
On props of smoothest shaven wood,
Large built and latticed well.

Well latticed—but the grate, alas!
Not rough with wire of steel or brass,
For Bully's plumage sake,
But smooth with wands from Ouse's side,
With which, when neatly peeled and dried,
The swains their baskets make.

Night veiled the pole; all seemed secure;
When, led by instinct sharp and sure,
Subsistence to provide,

* "Up all;" Ed. 1794-5, and editions up to 1808. "Away;" Ed. 1808, and subsequent editions.

A beast forth sallied on the scout,
Long backed, long tailed, with whiskered snout,
And badger-coloured hide.

He, entering at the study door,
Its ample area 'gan explore;
And something in the wind
Conjectured, sniffing round and round,
Better than all the books he found,
Food chiefly for the mind.

Just then, by adverse fate impressed,
A dream disturbed poor Bully's rest;
In sleep he seemed to view
A rat fast clinging to the cage,
And screaming at the sad presage,
Awoke and found it true.

For aided both by ear and scent,
Right to his mark the monster went—
Ah, Muse! forbear to speak
Minute the horrors that ensued;
His teeth were strong, the cage was wood—
He left poor Bully's beak.

Oh, had he made that too his prey!*
That beak, whence issued many a lay
Of such mellifluous tone,

This line stood originally thus:—"He left it—but he should have ta'en;" the next line ending with "strain." In the edition of 1808, 12mo. (i. 244) both lines were first altered into their present form.

Might have repaid him well, I wote,
For silencing so sweet a throat,
Fast stuck within his own.

Maria weeps—the Muses mourn—
So when, by Bacchanalians torn,
On Thracian Hebrus' side
The tree-enchanter Orpheus fell,
His head alone remained to tell
The cruel death he died.

THE ROSE.*

THE rose had been washed (just washed in a shower)
Which Mary to Anna conveyed,
The plentiful moisture encumbered the flower,
And weighed down its beautiful head.

The cup was all filled, and the leaves were all wet,
And it seemed to a fanciful view,
To weep for the buds it had left with regret,
On the flourishing bush where it grew.

Poems, 1794-5, ii. 347. Written in June 1783. See Letters of Cowper to Unwin, June 8, 1783, and to Lady Hesketh, Jan. 8, 1787. It was first printed in Gent. Mag. for June, 1785, p. 474.

I hastily seized it, unfit as it was
For a nosegay, so dripping and drowned,
And swinging it rudely, too rudely, alas!
I snapped it, it fell to the ground.

"And such," I exclaimed, "is the pitiless part
Some act by the delicate mind,
Regardless of wringing and breaking a heart
Already to sorrow resigned.

"This elegant rose, had I shaken it less,
Might have bloomed with its owner a while;
And the tear that is wiped with a little address
May be followed perhaps by a smile."

THE DOVES.*

REASONING at every step he treads,
Man yet mistakes his way,
While meaner things, whom instinct leads,
Are rarely known to stray.

One silent eve I wandered late,
And heard the voice of love;
The turtle thus addressed her mate,
And soothed the listening dove:—

* Poems, 1782, p. 299. Written in May 1780. See Letter of Cowper to Mrs. Newton, June 2, 1780.

" Our mutual bond of faith and truth
No time shall disengage,
Those blessings of our early youth
Shall cheer our latest age:

" While innocence without disguise
And constancy sincere,
Shall fill the circles of those eyes,
And mine can read them there,

" Those ills that wait on all below,
Shall ne'er be felt by me,
Or gently felt, and only so,
As being shared with thee.

" When lightnings flash among the trees,
Or kites are hovering near,
I fear lest thee alone they seize,
And know no other fear.

" 'Tis then I feel myself a wife,
And press thy wedded side,
Resolved a union formed for life
Death never shall divide.

" But oh! if, fickle and unchaste,
(Forgive a transient thought)
Thou couldst* become unkind at last,
And scorn thy present lot,

* First printed "couldst;" altered to "could" in Ed. 1787, and so continued up to 1817, when the original reading was restored; "couldst" has been adopted by Southey, Grimshawe, Dale, and Bell.

" No need of lightnings from on high,
Or kites with cruel beak;
Denied the endearments of thine eye,
This widowed heart would break."

Thus sang the sweet sequestered bird,
Soft as the passing wind,
And I recorded what I heard,
A lesson for mankind.

A FABLE.*

A RAVEN, while with glossy breast
Her new-laid eggs she fondly pressed,
And on her wickerwork high mounted,
Her chickens prematurely counted,
(A fault philosophers might blame
If quite exempted from the same)
Enjoyed at ease the genial day;
'Twas April as the bumpkins say,
The legislature called it May.†

* Poems, 1782, p. 302. Written May 9, 1780. See Cowper's Letter to Newton, dated on the following day.

† When these lines were written, nearly thirty years had elapsed since the change of the style, but no doubt Cowper was correct in representing that the old reckoning was still tenaciously adhered to by the rural population. In 1754, Lord Macclesfield's eldest son was assailed at a contested election in Oxfordshire, with vehement cries of "Give us back our eleven days!" and several years later the mortal illness of Bradley the astronomer was deemed, by the less educated of the people, to be a judgment upon him for having taken part in that "impious undertaking."—STANHOPE'S *Hist. England*, iii. 508.

But suddenly a wind, as high
As ever swept a winter sky,
Shook the young leaves about her ears,
And filled her with a thousand fears,
Lest the rude blast should snap the bough,
And spread her golden hopes below.
But just at eve the blowing weather
And all her fears were hushed together:
"And now," quoth poor unthinking Ralph,
"'Tis over, and the brood is safe;"
(For ravens, though, as birds of omen,
They teach both conjurers and old women
To tell us what is to befall,
Can't prophesy themselves at all.)
The morning came, when neighbour Hodge,
Who long had marked her airy lodge,
And destined all the treasure there
A gift to his expecting fair,
Climbed, like a squirrel to his dray,*
And bore the worthless prize away.

Moral.

'Tis Providence alone secures,
In every change, both mine and yours:
Safety consists not in escape
From dangers of a frightful shape;
An earthquake may be bid to spare
The man that's strangled by a hair.

* Dray, Drey, and Bay are names given in various places in England to the nest of the squirrel. See White's Selborne, ed. Bennett, p. 460.

Fate steals along with silent tread,
Found oftenest in what least we dread,
Frowns in the storm with angry brow,
But in the sunshine strikes the blow.

ODE TO APOLLO.*

ON AN INKGLASS ALMOST DRIED IN THE SUN.

ATRON of all those luckless brains,
That to the wrong side leaning,
Indite much metre with much pains,
And little or no meaning.

Ah! why, since oceans, rivers, streams,
That water all the nations,
Pay tribute to thy glorious beams,
In constant exhalations;

Why, stooping from the noon of day,
Too covetous of drink,
Apollo, hast thou stolen away
A poet's drop of ink?

Upborne into the viewless air,
It floats a vapour now,
Impelled through regions dense and rare
By all the winds that blow.

* Poems, 1794-5, ii. 350.

Ordained perhaps, ere summer flies,
Combined with millions more,
To form an Iris in the skies,
Though black and foul before.

Illustrious drop! and happy then,
Beyond the happiest lot
Of all that ever passed my pen,
So soon to be forgot.

Phœbus, if such be thy design,
To place it in thy bow,
Give wit, that what is left may shine
With equal grace below.

A COMPARISON.*

THE lapse of time and rivers is the same,
Both speed their journey with a restless stream;
The silent pace, with which they steal away,
No wealth can bribe, no prayers persuade to stay;
Alike irrevocable both when past,
And a wide ocean swallows both at last.
Though each resemble each in every part,
A difference strikes at length the musing heart;

* Poems, 1782, p. 304.

Streams never flow in vain ; where streams abound
How laughs the land with various plenty crowned !
But Time that should enrich the nobler mind,
Neglected, leaves a dreary waste behind.

ANOTHER.*

ADDRESSED TO A YOUNG LADY.

WEET stream that winds through yonder glade,
Apt emblem of a virtuous maid—
Silent and chaste she steals along,
Far from the world's gay, busy throng ;
With gentle yet prevailing force,
Intent upon her destined course ;
Graceful and useful all she does,
Blessing and blessed where'er she goes,
Pure-bosomed as that watery glass,
And Heaven reflected in her face.

* Poems, 1782, p. 304. Written in 1780; see Letter to Unwin, June 8, 1780.

THE POET'S NEW YEAR'S GIFT.*

TO MRS. THROCKMORTON.

MARIA! I have every good
For thee wished many a time,
Both sad and in a cheerful mood,
But never yet in rhyme.

To wish thee fairer is no need,
More prudent, or more sprightly,
Or more ingenious, or more freed
From temper-flaws unsightly.

What favour then not yet possessed
Can I for thee require,
In wedded love already blest,
To thy whole heart's desire?

None here is happy but in part:
Full bliss is bliss divine;
There dwells some wish in every heart,
And doubtless one in thine.

That wish on some fair future day,
Which fate shall brightly gild,
('Tis blameless, be it what it may)
I wish it all fulfilled.

* Poems, 1794-5, ii. 348. Written for the 1st Jan. 1788. See Letter to Lady Hesketh of that date.

PAIRING TIME ANTICIPATED.*

A FABLE.

I SHALL not ask Jean Jacques Rousseau†
If birds confabulate or no;
'Tis clear that they were always able
To hold discourse, at least in fable;
And e'en the child who knows no better,
Than to interpret by the letter,
A story of a cock and bull,
Must have a most uncommon skull.
It chanced then on a winter's day,
But warm, and bright, and calm as May,
The birds, conceiving a design
To forestall sweet St. Valentine,
In many an orchard, copse, and grove,
Assembled on affairs of love,
And with much twitter, and much chatter,
Began to agitate the matter.
At length a Bullfinch, who could boast
More years and wisdom than the most,
Entreated, opening wide his beak,
A moment's liberty to speak;

* Poems, 1794-5, ii. 361.

† It was one of the whimsical speculations of this philosopher, that all fables, which ascribe reason and speech to animals, should be withheld from children, as being only vehicles of deception. But what child was ever deceived by them, or can be, against the evidence of his senses?—(C. 1795.)

And, silence publicly enjoined,
Delivered briefly thus his mind:
" My friends! be cautious how ye treat
The subject upon which we meet;
I fear we shall have winter yet."
A Finch, whose tongue knew no control,
With golden wing and satin poll,
A last year's bird, who ne'er had tried
What marriage means, thus pert replied:
" Methinks the gentleman," quoth she,
" Opposite in the apple-tree,
By his good will would keep us single,
Till yonder heaven and earth shall mingle,
Or (which is likelier to befall)
Till death, exterminate us all.
I marry without more ado;
My dear Dick Redcap, what say you?"
Dick heard, and tweedling, ogling, bridling,
Turning short round, strutting, and sideling,
Attested, glad, his approbation
Of an immediate conjugation.
Their sentiments so well expressed
Influenced mightily the rest,
All paired, and each pair built a nest.
But though the birds were thus in haste,
The leaves came on not quite so fast,
And Destiny, that sometimes bears
An aspect stern on man's affairs,
Not altogether smiled on theirs.
The wind, of late breathed gently forth,
Now shifted east, and east by north;
Bare trees and shrubs but ill, you know,
Could shelter them from rain or snow

Stepping into their nests, they paddled,
Themselves were chilled, their eggs were addled:
Soon every father-bird and mother
Grew quarrelsome, and pecked each other,
Parted without the least regret,
Except that they had ever met,
And learned in future to be wiser,
Than to neglect a good adviser.

MORAL.

Misses! the tale that I relate
This lesson seems to carry—
Choose not alone a proper mate,
But proper time to marry.

THE DOG AND THE WATER LILY.*

NO FABLE.

THE noon was shady, and soft airs
Swept Ouse's silent tide,
When, 'scaped from literary cares,
I wandered on his side.

My spaniel, prettiest of his race,
And high in pedigree,

* Poems, 1799, ii. 295. The incident on which the Poem was founded took place in June 1788. See Letter to Lady Hesketh, of the 27th of that month.

(Two nymphs* adorned with every grace,
That spaniel found for me)

Now wantoned lost in flags and reeds,
Now starting into sight,
Pursued the swallow o'er the meads
With scarce a slower flight.

It was the time when Ouse displayed
His lilies newly blown;
Their beauties I intent surveyed,
And one I wished my own.

With cane extended far, I sought
To steer it close to land;
But still the prize, though nearly caught,
Escaped my eager hand.

Beau marked my unsuccessful pains
With fixed considerate face,
And puzzling set his puppy brains
To comprehend the case.

But with a cherup clear and strong
Dispersing all his dream,
I thence withdrew, and followed long
The windings of the stream.

* Sir Robert Gunning's daughters.—(C.) These young ladies, daughters of Sir Robert Gunning, the ambassador and first Baronet of that name, were granddaughters of a brother of the celebrated beauties of the reigns of George II. and III. Their father had a seat, still occupied by the family, at Horton in Northamptonshire, near Olney.

My ramble ended,* I returned;
  Beau trotting far before,
The floating wreath again discerned,
  And plunging left the shore.

I saw him, with that lily cropped,
  Impatient swim to meet
My quick approach, and soon he dropped
  The treasure at my feet.

Charmed with the sight, "The world," I cried,
  "Shall hear of this thy deed:
My dog shall mortify the pride
  Of man's superior breed:

"But chief, myself I will enjoin,
  Awake at Duty's call,
To show a love as prompt as thine
  To Him who gives me all."

THE WINTER NOSEGAY.†

WHAT Nature, alas! has denied
  To the delicate growth of our isle,
Art has in a measure supplied,
  And winter is decked with a smile.

* "Finished;" Ed. 1799, and other Eds. until 1808, when "ended" was first substituted, and has since been universally adopted.

† Poems, 1782, p. 346.

See, Mary, what beauties I bring
From the shelter of that sunny shed,
Where the flowers have the charms of the spring,
Though abroad they are frozen and dead.

'Tis a bower of Arcadian sweets,
Where Flora is still in her prime,
A fortress to which she retreats,
From the cruel assaults of the clime.
While Earth wears a mantle of snow,
These pinks are as fresh, and as gay,
As the fairest and sweetest that blow
On the beautiful bosom of May.

See how they have safely survived
The frowns of a sky so severe;—
Such Mary's true love, that has lived
Through many a turbulent year.
The charms of the late-blowing rose
Seem graced with a livelier hue,
And the winter of sorrow best shows
The truth of a friend, such as you.

THE POET, THE OYSTER, AND SENSITIVE PLANT.*

N oyster, cast upon the shore,
Was heard,—though never heard before,
Complaining in a speech well worded,
And worthy thus to be recorded:—
"Ah, hapless wretch! condemned to dwell
For ever in my native shell,
Ordained to move when others please,
Not for my own content or ease,
But tossed and buffeted about,
Now in the water and now out.
'Twere better to be born a stone,
Of ruder shape, and feeling none,
Than with a tenderness like mine,
And sensibilities so fine!
I envy that unfeeling shrub,
Fast rooted against every rub."
The plant he meant grew not far off,
And felt the sneer with scorn enough:
Was hurt, disgusted, mortified,
And with asperity replied:—
"When, cry the botanists, and stare,
Did plants called sensitive grow there?"
No matter when—a poet's Muse is
To make them grow just where she chooses.

* Poems, 1782, p. 362.

" You shapeless nothing in a dish,
You that are but almost a fish,
I scorn your coarse insinuation,
And have most plentiful occasion
To wish myself the rock I view,
Or such another dolt as you:
For many a grave and learned clerk,
And many a gay unlettered spark,
With curious touch examines me,
If I can feel as well as he;
And when I bend, retire, and shrink,
Says—' Well, 'tis more than one would think!'
Thus life is spent (oh fie upon't!)
In being touched, and crying—Don't!"
A Poet, in his evening walk,
O'erheard and checked this idle talk.
" And your fine sense," he said, " and yours,
Whatever evil it endures,
Deserves not, if so soon offended,
Much to be pitied or commended.
Disputes, though short, are far too long,
Where both alike are in the wrong;
Your feelings in their full amount
Are all upon your own account.
" You, in your grotto-work enclosed,
Complain of being thus exposed;
Yet nothing feel in that rough coat
Save when the knife is at your throat,
Wherever driven by wind or tide,
Exempt from every ill beside.
" And as for you, my Lady Squeamish,
Who reckon every touch a blemish,
If all the plants that can be found

Embellishing the scene around,
Should droop and wither where they grow,
You would not feel at all—not you.
The noblest minds their virtue prove
By pity, sympathy, and love:
These, these are feelings truly fine,
And prove their owner half divine."
His censure reached them as he dealt it,
And each by shrinking showed he felt it.

THE SHRUBBERY.*

WRITTEN IN A TIME OF AFFLICTION.

HAPPY shades!—to me unblest;
Friendly to peace, but not to me;
How ill the scene that offers rest,
And heart that cannot rest, agree!

This glassy stream, that spreading pine,
Those alders quivering to the breeze,
Might soothe a soul less hurt than mine,
And please, if any thing could please.

But fixed, unalterable care
Foregoes not what she feels within,
Shows the same sadness every where,
And slights the season and the scene.

* Poems, 1782, p. 344.

For all that pleased in wood or lawn,
While Peace possessed these silent bowers,
Her animating smile withdrawn,
Has lost its beauties and its powers.

The saint or moralist should tread
This moss-grown alley, musing, slow;
They seek like me the secret shade,
But not like me to nourish woe!

Me fruitful scenes and prospects waste
Alike admonish not to roam;
These tell me of enjoyments past,
And those of sorrows yet to come.

MUTUAL FORBEARANCE.

NECESSARY TO THE HAPPINESS OF THE MARRIED STATE.*

THE lady thus addressed her spouse—
"What a mere dungeon is this house!
By no means large enough; and was it,
Yet this dull room, and that dark closet,
Those hangings with their worn-out graces,
Long beards, long noses, and pale faces,
Are such an antiquated scene,
They overwhelm me with the spleen."

* Poems, 1782, p 347.

Sir Humphrey, shooting in the dark,
Makes answer quite beside the mark:
"No doubt, my dear, I bade him come,
Engaged myself to be at home,
And shall expect him at the door
Precisely when the clock strikes four."
"You are so deaf," the lady cried,
(And raised her voice, and frowned beside)
"You are so sadly deaf, my dear,
What shall I do to make you hear?"
"Dismiss poor Harry!" he replies;
"Some people are more nice than wise,
For one slight trespass all this stir?
What if he did ride whip and spur,
'Twas but a mile; your favourite horse
Will never look one hair the worse."
"Well, I protest 'tis past all bearing!"
"Child! I am rather hard of hearing."
"Yes, truly—one must scream and bawl:
I tell you, you can't hear at all!"
Then, with a voice exceeding low,
"No matter if you hear or no."
Alas! and is domestic strife,
That sorest ill of human life,
A plague so little to be feared,
As to be wantonly incurred,
To gratify a fretful passion,
On every trivial provocation?
The kindest and the happiest pair
Will find occasion to forbear,
And something every day they live
To pity, and perhaps forgive.
But if infirmities that fall

In common to the lot of all,
A blemish, or a sense impaired,
Are crimes so little to be spared,
Then farewell all that must create
The comfort of the wedded state;
Instead of harmony, 'tis jar,
And tumult, and intestine war.
The Love that cheers life's latest stage,
Proof against sickness and old age,
Preserved by virtue from declension,
Becomes not weary of attention,
But lives when that exterior grace,
Which first inspired the flame, decays.
'Tis gentle, delicate, and kind,
To faults compassionate or blind,
And will, with sympathy, endure
Those evils it would gladly cure;
But angry, coarse, and harsh expression
Shows Love to be a mere profession;
Proves that the heart is none of his,
Or soon expels him if it is.

THE NEGRO'S COMPLAINT.*

ORCED from home and all its pleasures,
Afric's coast I left forlorn;
To increase a stranger's treasures,
O'er the raging billows borne.

* Poems, 1803, i. 311. Written in 1788; see Cowper's letter to General Cowper, written in March of that year.

Men from England bought and sold me,
Paid my price in paltry gold;
But, though slave* they have enrolled me,
Minds are never to be sold.

Still in thought as free as ever,
What are England's rights, I ask,
Me from my delights to sever,
Me to torture, me to task?
Fleecy locks and black complexion
Cannot forfeit Nature's claim;
Skins may differ, but affection
Dwells in white and black the same.

Why did all-creating Nature
Make the plant for which we toil?
Sighs must fan it, tears must water,
Sweat of ours must dress the soil.
Think, ye masters iron-hearted,
Lolling at your jovial boards,
Think how many backs have smarted,
For the sweets your cane affords.

Is there, as ye sometimes tell us,
Is there One who reigns on high?
Has He bid you buy and sell us,
Speaking from his throne, the sky?
Ask him, if your knotted scourges,
Matches, blood-extorting screws,
Are the means that duty urges
Agents of his will to use?

* Originally printed "though theirs," but altered to "though slave," in Ed. 1808, i. 276.

Hark! He answers—Wild tornadoes,
Strewing yonder sea with wrecks,
Wasting towns, plantations, meadows,
Are the voice with which He speaks.
He, foreseeing what vexations
Afric's sons should undergo,
Fixed their tyrants' habitations
Where his whirlwinds answer—" No."

By our blood in Afric wasted,
Ere our necks received the chain;
By the miseries that we tasted,
Crossing in your barks the main;
By our sufferings, since ye brought us
To the man-degrading mart;
All sustained by patience, taught us
Only by a broken heart;

Deem our nation brutes no longer,
Till some reason ye shall find
Worthier of regard, and stronger
Than the colour of our kind.
Slaves of gold, whose sordid dealings
Tarnish all your boasted powers,
Prove that you have human feelings,
Ere you proudly question ours!

PITY FOR POOR AFRICANS.*

Video meliora proboque,
Deteriora sequor.
[OVID, *Metamorph.* vii. 20.]

I OWN I am shocked at the purchase of slaves,
And fear those who buy them and sell them, are knaves;
What I hear of their hardships, their tortures, and groans,
Is almost enough to draw pity from stones.

I pity them greatly, but I must be mum,
For how could we do without sugar and rum?
Especially sugar, so needful we see?
What, give up our desserts, our coffee, and tea!

Besides, if we do, the French, Dutch, and Danes
Will heartily thank us, no doubt, for our pains:
If we do not buy the poor creatures, they will,
And tortures and groans will be multiplied still.

If foreigners likewise would give up the trade,
Much more in behalf of your wish might be said;
But while they get riches by purchasing blacks,
Pray tell me why we may not also go snacks?

* Poems, 1803, i. 317. Written about the same time as the preceding.

Your scruples and arguments bring to my mind
A story so pat, you may think it is coined,
On purpose to answer you, out of my mint;
But I can assure you I saw it in print.

A youngster at school, more sedate than the rest,
Had once his integrity put to the test;
His comrades had plotted an orchard to rob,
And asked him to go and assist in the job.

He was shocked, sir, like you, and answered—
"Oh no!
What! rob our good neighbour! I pray you don't go;
Besides the man's poor, his orchard's his bread,
Then think of his children, for they must be fed."

"You speak very fine, and you look very grave,
But apples we want, and apples we'll have;
If you will go with us, you shall have a share,
If not, you shall have neither apple nor pear."

They spoke, and Tom pondered—"I see they will go:
Poor man! what a pity to injure him so!
Poor man! I would save him his fruit if I could,
But staying behind will do him no good.

"If the matter depended alone upon me,
His apples might hang till they dropped from the tree;
But since they will take them, I think I'll go too,
He will lose none by me, though I get a few."

His scruples thus silenced, Tom felt more at ease,
And went with his comrades the apples to seize;
He blamed and protested, but joined in the plan:
He shared in the plunder, but pitied the man.

THE MORNING DREAM.*

WAS in the glad season of spring,
Asleep at the dawn of the day,
I dreamed what I cannot but sing,
So pleasant it seemed as I lay.
I dreamed that, on ocean afloat,
Far hence to the westward I sailed,
While the billows high-lifted the boat,
And the fresh-blowing breeze never failed.

In the steerage a woman I saw,
Such at least was the form that she wore,
Whose beauty impressed me with awe,
Ne'er taught me by woman before.
She sat, and a shield at her side
Shed light, like a sun on the waves,
And smiling divinely, she cried—
"I go to make Freemen of Slaves."

Then raising her voice to a strain
The sweetest that ear ever heard,

* Poems, 1803, i. 317. Written about the same time as the two preceding poems. Cowper wrote these three compositions on the solicitation of his relation, General Cowper.

She sung of the slave's broken chain,
  Wherever her glory appeared.
Some clouds which had over us hung,
  Fled, chased by her melody clear,
And methought while she Liberty sung,
  'Twas Liberty only to hear.

Thus swiftly dividing the flood,
  To a slave-cultured island we came,
Where a Demon, her enemy, stood—
  Oppression his terrible name.
In his hand, as the sign of his sway,
  A scourge hung with lashes he bore,
And stood looking out for his prey
  From Africa's sorrowful shore.

But soon as approaching the land,
  That goddess-like woman he viewed;
The scourge he let fall from his hand,
  With blood of his subjects imbrued.
I saw him both sicken and die,
  And the moment the monster expired,
Heard shouts that ascended the sky,
  From thousands with rapture inspired.

Awaking, how could I but muse
  At what such a dream should betide?
But soon my ear caught the glad news,
  Which served my weak thought for a guide;—
That Britannia, renowned o'er the waves,
  For the hatred she ever has shown
To the black-sceptred rulers of slaves,
  Resolves to have none of her own.

THE DIVERTING HISTORY OF JOHN GILPIN.*

Shewing how he went farther than he intended, and came safe home again.

JOHN GILPIN was a citizen
Of credit and renown,
A trainband captain eke was he
Of famous London town.

John Gilpin's spouse said to her dear,
"Though wedded we have been
These twice ten tedious years, yet we
No holiday have seen.

To-morrow is our wedding day,
And we will then repair
Unto the Bell at Edmonton,
All in a chaise and pair.

My sister, and my sister's child,
Myself, and children three,
Will fill the chaise; so you must ride
On horseback after we."

* Poems, 1785, ii. 343. Written in October, 1782, and first printed in the "Public Advertiser" of 14th November, in that year. See Cowper's Letter to the Rev. W. Unwin, 4th Nov. 1782, and those to Mr. Hill, 13th and 20th Feb. 1783.

He soon replied,—" I do admire
Of womankind but one,
And you are she, my dearest dear,
Therefore it shall be done.

I am a linendraper bold,
As all the world doth know,
And my good friend the calender
Will lend his horse to go."

Quoth Mrs. Gilpin,—" That's well said;
And for that wine is dear,
We will be furnished with our own,
Which is both bright and clear."

John Gilpin kissed his loving wife;
O'erjoyed was he to find,
That, though on pleasure she was bent,
She had a frugal mind.

The morning came, the chaise was brought,
But yet was not allowed
To drive up to the door, lest all
Should say that she was proud.

So three doors off the chaise was stayed,
Where they did all get in;
Six precious souls, and all agog
To dash through thick and thin.

Smack went the whip, round went the wheels,
Were never folk so glad,
The stones did rattle underneath,
As if Cheapside were mad.

John Gilpin at his horse's side
Seized fast the flowing mane,
And up he got, in haste to ride,
But soon came down again;

For saddletree scarce reached had he,
His journey to begin,
When, turning round his head, he saw
Three customers come in.

So down he came; for loss of time,
Although it grieved him sore,
Yet loss of pence, full well he knew,
Would trouble him much more.

'Twas long before the customers
Were suited to their mind,
When Betty screaming came down stairs,—
"The wine is left behind!"

"Good lack!" quoth he, "yet bring it me,
My leathern belt likewise,
In which I bear my trusty sword
When I do exercise."

Now mistress Gilpin (careful soul!)
Had two stone bottles found,
To hold the liquor that she loved,
And keep it safe and sound.

Each bottle had a curling ear,
Through which the belt he drew,
And hung a bottle on each side,
To make his balance true.

Then over all, that he might be
Equipped from top to toe,
His long red cloak, well brushed and neat,
He manfully did throw.

Now see him mounted once again
Upon his nimble steed,
Full slowly pacing o'er the stones,
With caution and good heed.

But finding soon a smoother road
Beneath his well shod feet,
The snorting beast began to trot,
Which galled him in his seat.

So, "Fair and softly," John he cried,
But John he cried in vain;
That trot became a gallop soon,
In spite of curb and rein.

So stooping down, as needs he must
Who cannot sit upright,
He grasped the mane with both his hands,
And eke with all his might.

His horse, who never in that sort
Had handled been before,
What thing upon his back had got
Did wonder more and more.

Away went Gilpin, neck or naught;
Away went hat and wig;
He little dreamt, when he set out,
Of running such a rig.

The wind did blow, the cloak did fly,
Like streamer long and gay,
Till, loop and button failing both,
At last it flew away.

Then might all people well discern
The bottles he had slung;
A bottle swinging at each side,
As hath been said or sung.

The dogs did bark, the children screamed,
Up flew the windows all;
And every soul cried out, "Well done!"
As loud as he could bawl:

Away went Gilpin—who but he?
His fame soon spread around;
"He carries weight!" "He rides a race!"
"'Tis for a thousand pound!"

And still, as fast as he drew near,
'Twas wonderful to view,
How in a trice the turnpike men
Their gates wide open threw.

And now, as he went bowing down
His reeking head full low,
The bottles twain behind his back
Were shattered at a blow.

Down ran the wine into the road,
Most piteous to be seen,
Which made his horse's flanks to smoke
As they had basted been.

But still he seemed to carry weight,
With leathern girdle braced;
For all might see the bottle necks
Still dangling at his waist.

Thus all through merry Islington
These gambols he did play,
Until he came unto the Wash
Of Edmonton so gay;

And there he threw the Wash about,
On both sides of the way,
Just like unto a trundling mop,
Or a wild goose at play.

At Edmonton, his loving wife
From the balcony spied
Her tender husband, wondering much
To see how he did ride.

"Stop, stop, John Gilpin!—Here's the house!"
They all at once did cry;
"The dinner waits, and we are tired:"—
Said Gilpin—"So am I!"

But yet his horse was not a whit
Inclined to tarry there;
For why?—his owner had a house
Full ten miles off, at Ware.

So like an arrow swift he flew,
Shot by an archer strong;
So did he fly—which brings me to
The middle of my song.

Away went Gilpin, out of breath,
And sore against his will,
Till, at his friend the calender's,
His horse at last stood still.

The calender, amazed to see
His neighbour in such trim,
Laid down his pipe, flew to the gate,
And thus accosted him:—

"What news? what news? your tidings tell;
Tell me you must and shall—
Say why bareheaded you are come,
Or why you come at all?"

Now Gilpin had a pleasant wit,
And loved a timely joke;
And thus unto the calender,
In merry guise, he spoke:

"I came because your horse would come;
And, if I well forebode,
My hat and wig will soon be here,—
They are upon the road."

The calender, right glad to find
His friend in merry pin,
Returned him not a single word,
But to the house went in;

Whence straight he came with hat and wig;
A wig that flowed behind,
A hat not much the worse for wear,
Each comely in its kind.

He held them up, and in his turn,
Thus showed his ready wit;—
"My head is twice as big as yours,
They therefore needs must fit.

"But let me scrape the dirt away
That hangs upon your face;
And stop and eat, for well you may
Be in a hungry case."

Said John,—"It is my wedding day,
And all the world would stare,
If wife should dine at Edmonton,
And I should dine at Ware."

So turning to his horse, he said,
"I am in haste to dine;
'Twas for your pleasure you came here,
You shall go back for mine."

Ah! luckless speech, and bootless boast,
For which he paid full dear;
For while he spake, a braying ass
Did sing most loud and clear;

Whereat his horse did snort, as he
Had heard a lion roar,
And galloped off with all his might,
As he had done before.

Away went Gilpin, and away
Went Gilpin's hat and wig:
He lost them sooner than at first,
For why?—they were too big.

Now mistress Gilpin, when she saw
  Her husband posting down
Into the country far away,
  She pulled out half-a-crown;

And thus unto the youth she said,
  That drove them to the Bell,
"This shall be yours, when you bring back
  My husband safe and well."

The youth did ride, and soon did meet
  John coming back amain;
Whom in a trice he tried to stop
  By catching at his rein;

But not performing what he meant,
  And gladly would have done,
The frighted steed he frighted more,
  And made him faster run.

Away went Gilpin, and away
  Went postboy at his heels,
The postboy's horse right glad to miss
  The lumbering of the wheels.

Six gentlemen upon the road,
  Thus seeing Gilpin fly,
With postboy scampering in the rear,
  They raised the hue and cry:—

"Stop thief! stop thief!—a highwayman!"
  Not one of them was mute;
And all and each that passed that way
  Did join in the pursuit.

And now the turnpike-gates again
  Flew open in short space;
The toll-men thinking as before,
  That Gilpin rode a race.

And so he did, and won it too,
  For he got first to town;
Nor stopped till where he had got up
  He did again get down.

Now let us sing, long live the King,
  And Gilpin, long live he;
And when he next doth ride abroad,
  May I be there to see!

THE NIGHTINGALE AND GLOWWORM.*

A NIGHTINGALE, that all day long
Had cheered the village with his song,
Nor yet at eve his note suspended,
Nor yet when eventide was ended,
Began to feel, as well he might,
The keen demands of appetite;
When, looking eagerly around,
He spied far off, upon the ground,
A something shining in the dark,
And knew it was a glowworm by his spark;

* Poems, 1782, p. 326. Written in February, 1780: see Letter of the 27th of that month, to the Rev. W. Unwin.

So stooping down from hawthorn top,
He thought to put him in his crop.
The worm, aware of his intent,
Harangued him thus, right eloquent;—
"Did you admire my lamp," quoth he,
"As much as I your minstrelsy,
You would abhor to do me wrong,
As much as I to spoil your song;
For 'twas the self-same Power Divine
Taught you to sing, and me to shine;
That you with music, I with light,
Might beautify and cheer the night."
The songster heard his short oration,
And warbling out his approbation,
Released him, as my story tells,
And found a supper somewhere else.

Hence jarring sectaries may learn
Their real interest to discern;
That brother should not war with brother,
And worry and devour each other;
But sing and shine by sweet consent,
Till life's poor transient night is spent,
Respecting in each other's case
The gifts of Nature and of Grace.

Those Christians best deserve the name
Who studiously make peace their aim;
Peace, both the duty and the prize
Of him that creeps and him that flies.

AN EPISTLE TO AN AFFLICTED PROTESTANT LADY IN FRANCE.*

MADAM,

A STRANGER'S purpose in these lays
Is to congratulate, and not to praise.
To give the creature the† Creator's due
Were sin in me, and an offence to you.
From man to man, or e'en to woman paid,
Praise is the medium of a knavish trade,
A coin by Craft for Folly's use designed,
Spurious, and only current with the blind.
The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown;
No traveller ever reached that blest abode,
Who found not thorns and briers in his road.
The world may dance along the flowery plain,
Cheered as they go by many a sprightly strain,
Where Nature has her mossy velvet spread,
With unshod feet they yet securely tread,
Admonished, scorn the caution and the friend,
Bent all on‡ pleasure, heedless of its end.

* Printed in Bull's collection of Cowper's Translations from Madame Guion. Lond. 1801. First included in the edition of Cowper's collected Poems of 1805, ii. 299. We adopt the text of the latter edition. The lady to whom the poem was addressed was a Mrs. Billacoys.—See DE COETLOGON'S *Theological Miscellany*, 1787-89.

† "Her Creator;" Bull's Ed.

‡ "Bent upon pleasure;" Bull's Ed.

But He who knew what human hearts would prove,
How slow to learn the dictates of his love,
That hard by nature, and of stubborn will,
A life of ease would make them harder still,
In pity to the souls his Grace designed
To rescue from the ruins of mankind,
Called for a cloud to darken all their years,
And said, " Go, spend them in the vale of tears."
O balmy gales of soul-reviving air!
O salutary streams, that murmur there!
These flowing from the fount of grace above,
Those breathed from lips of everlasting love.
The flinty soil indeed their feet annoys;
Chill blasts of trouble nip* their springing joys;
An envious world will interpose its frown,
To mar delights superior to its own;
And many a pang, experienced still within,
Reminds them of their hated inmate, Sin:
But ills of every shape and every name,
Transformed to blessings, miss their cruel aim;
And every moment's calm, that soothes the breast,
Is given in earnest of eternal rest.

Ah! be not sad, although thy lot be cast
Far from the flock, and in a boundless waste;
No shepherd's tents within thy view appear,
But the Chief Shepherd even there is near;
Thy tender sorrows and thy plaintive strain
Flow in a foreign land, but not in vain;
Thy tears all issue from a source divine,
And every drop bespeaks a Saviour thine—
So once in Gideon's fleece the dews were found,
And drought on all the drooping herbs around.

* " And sudden sorrow nips;" Bull's Ed.

TO THE REV. WM. CAWTHORNE UNWIN.*

NWIN, I should but ill repay
The kindness of a friend,
Whose worth deserves as warm a lay,
As ever Friendship penned,
Thy name omitted, in a page
That would reclaim a vicious age.

A union formed, as mine with thee,
Not rashly, or in sport,
May be as fervent in degree,
And faithful in its sort,
And may as rich in comfort prove,
As that of true fraternal love.

The bud inserted in the rind,
The bud of peach or rose,
Adorns, though differing in its kind,
The stock whereon it grows,
With flower as sweet, or fruit as fair,
As if produced by Nature there.

Not rich, I render what I may,
I seize thy name in haste,
And place it in this first essay,
Lest this should prove the last;
'Tis where it should be, in a plan,
That holds in view the good of man.

* Poems, 1782, p. 366.

The poet's lyre, to fix his fame,
  Should be the poet's heart;
Affection lights a brighter flame
  Than ever blazed by art.
No Muses on these lines attend,
I sink the poet in the friend.

END OF VOL. I.

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